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play

E3 2003

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Halo 2

P.N.03

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What is the Matrix?

Find out inside...

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Fact or fiction?
Evangelion Live
The film you thought you'd never see

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Arc the Lad
Soldier of Fortune 2
Brute Force
Enter the Matrix

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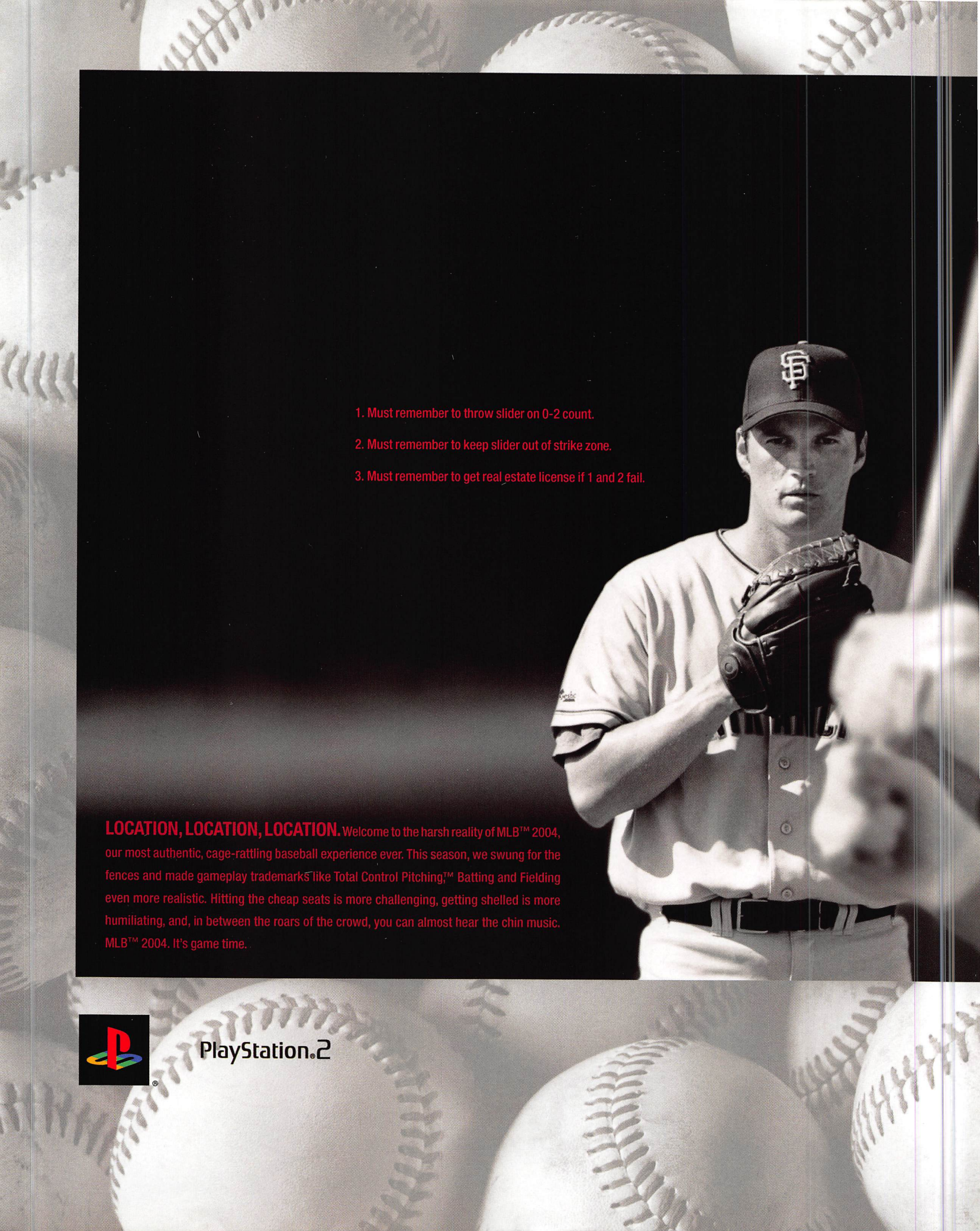
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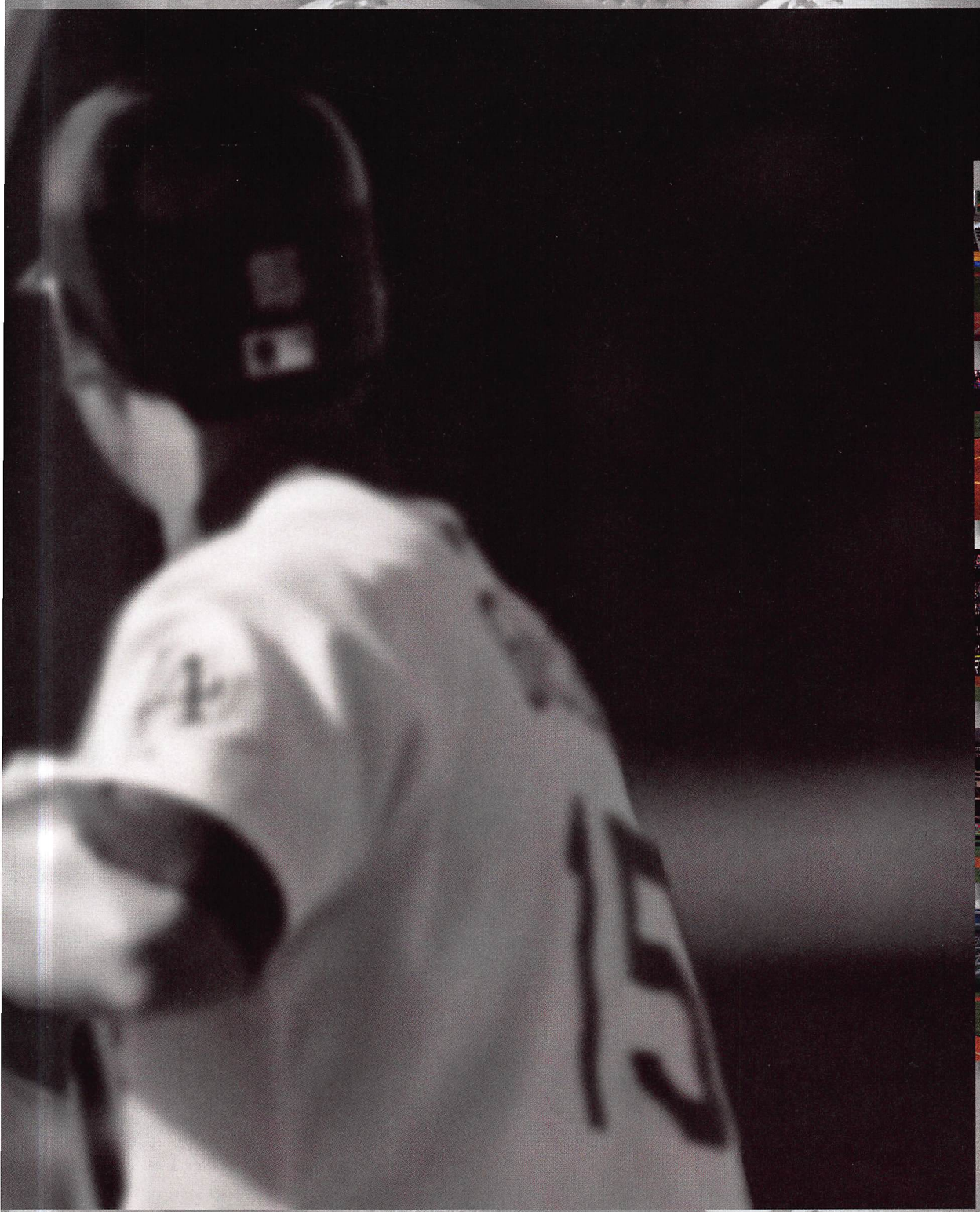
PlayStation.2



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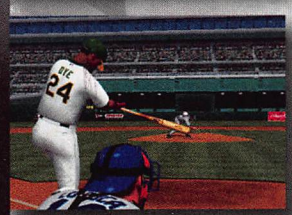

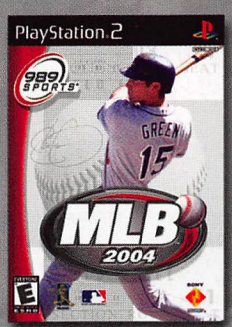

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Get into it!

We go off on E3 to the tune of 46 pages beginning on pg. 22, so I'm going to focus on one aspect of the show I couldn't fit into my E3 wrap-up. This year's theatre of games left me with little to complain about but not as many surprises as I had hoped for: no smaller Xbox, no playable Ninja Gaiden, no new Nintendo franchise, and no "break through" game to speak of. There was, however, tons of good, lots of great, and little crap to speak of, although no one game stood out as utterly superior.

This is an industry now adept at sizing up its clientele, with so many developers making games that no single genre is being overlooked. I thought my big story was going to be the death of the platformer, but no sooner than a colleague and I were discussing what is needed to prevent that, we witnessed an inkling of it three-fold in Beyond Good and Evil, Viewtiful Joe and Voodoo Vince (which the more we see, the more we like). That said, I did meet many an executive who regard the genre as in a precarious state, lingering in the nether regions of a new American consciousness, whereas 20- and 30-somethings weaned on Mario and Sonic (considered a dwindling demographic) long for more, while today's teens see them as passé, devoid of cool and somewhat…well…lame. This leads me back to the conversation I was having with my colleague about how the genre needs to gain an edge to survive. We say enough with the frolicking critters already; it's time for the dawning of the M-rated platformer.

Imagine the gameplay of a Mario Sunshine, Maximo or Jak and Daxter, with mature or dark themes—be they gothic, sexual, hyper-violent, or otherwise—like a Manson video or dark anime brought to life. With gameplay to appease the hardcore gamer in all of us, along with subject matter fit for mass consumption beyond the wonder years, the possibilities seem endless, and rap and new-metal certainly seem primed for 3D life. The realistic violence thing seems to have pretty much run its course anyway: between GTA: Vice City and State of Emergency, how much more gratuitous can it get? Isn't it time for a pint-sized killing machine we can all believe in? It's a shame (and a crime) that the game that would have become the poster child for the kind (In-Utero's Evil Twin) was canned, but let's not give up now; there's hope yet for this mightiest of game genres.

Platforming epics aside, this year's E3 saw Sony birth the 800 lb. gorilla to eat all 800 lb. gorillas, a flustered but determined Nintendo, and a stalwart Microsoft, amidst an industry comfortable in its skin swimming in quality software for children of all ages. As much as this month's cover celebrates the continued perfecting of the female form in gaming, our E3 section epitomizes all that is new, so sit back, enjoy our new, even higher-quality paper, and take it in. As always, your feedback is not only welcome, but preferred.

PS. If Neo is an anomaly lead to the Architect by The Oracle program, then isn't the one who delivered him to The Oracle a program as well? Therefore could Morpheus be a program of a similar nature to Agent Smith able to be housed inside a human host? This would explain why he has been to this point so sure that Neo was The One and that the prophecy was real. What if he's a program but doesn't know it? When he learns, would his program allow him to fight by Neo's side thus beginning an era of unity between man and machine? Or will they just fire up more of those awesome Zion mechs and lay the smack down on the Sentinels? Any thoughts on *Reloaded* or *Enter The Matrix*, let us know.

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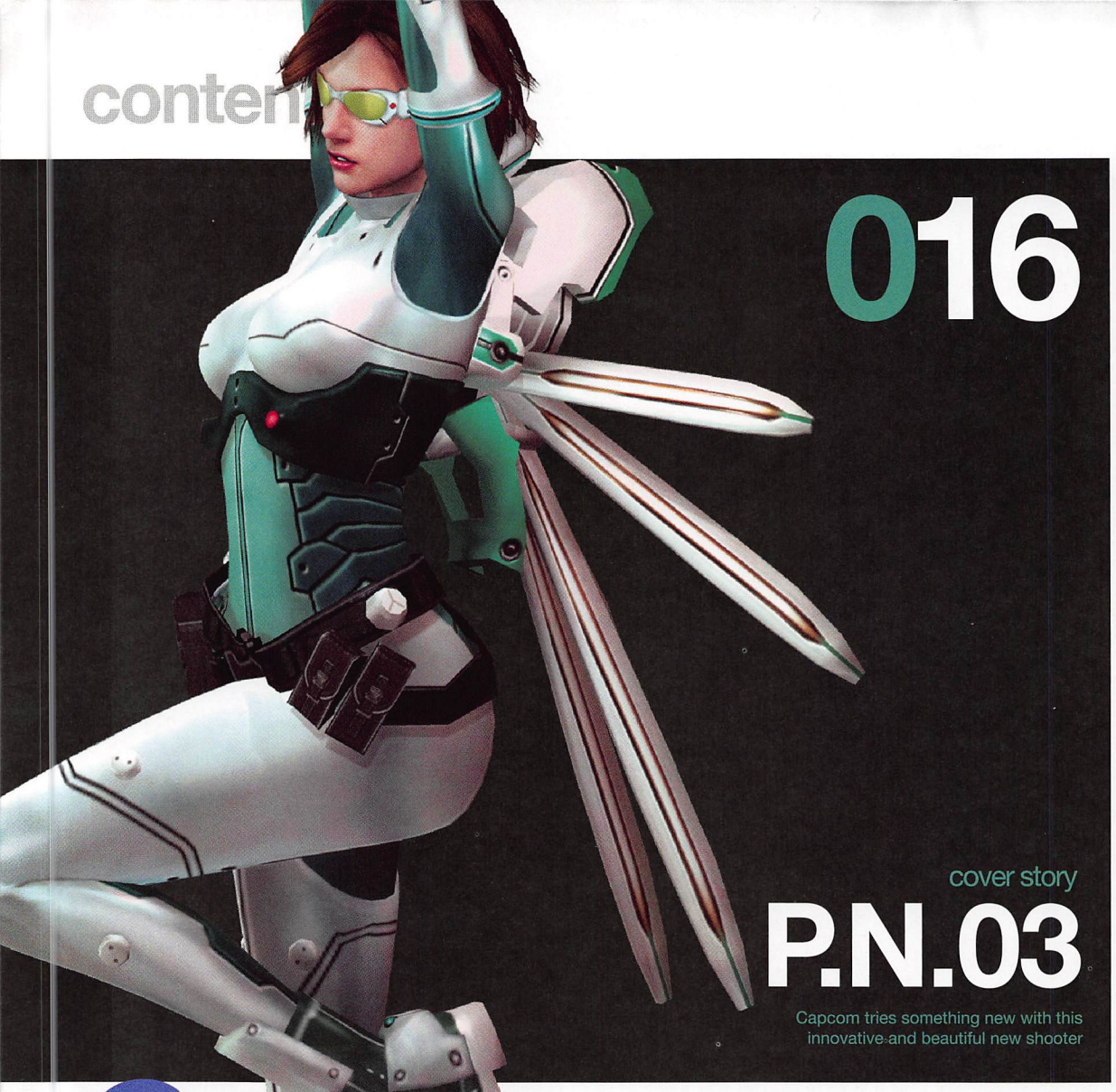

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cover story

P.N.03

Capcom tries something new with this innovative and beautiful new shooter

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A new console is on the way, and it's not what you expect

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No one does action like the Japanese

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Half Life 2 is looking great, but for a big selection of previews, look no further than our E3 section

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E3 2003

Lots to see here. Our E3 2003 coverage begins on page 22

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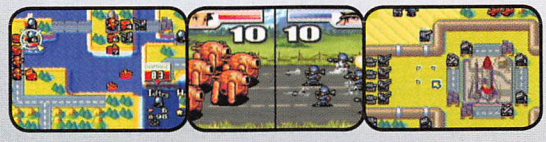
Roll out the heavy artillery.



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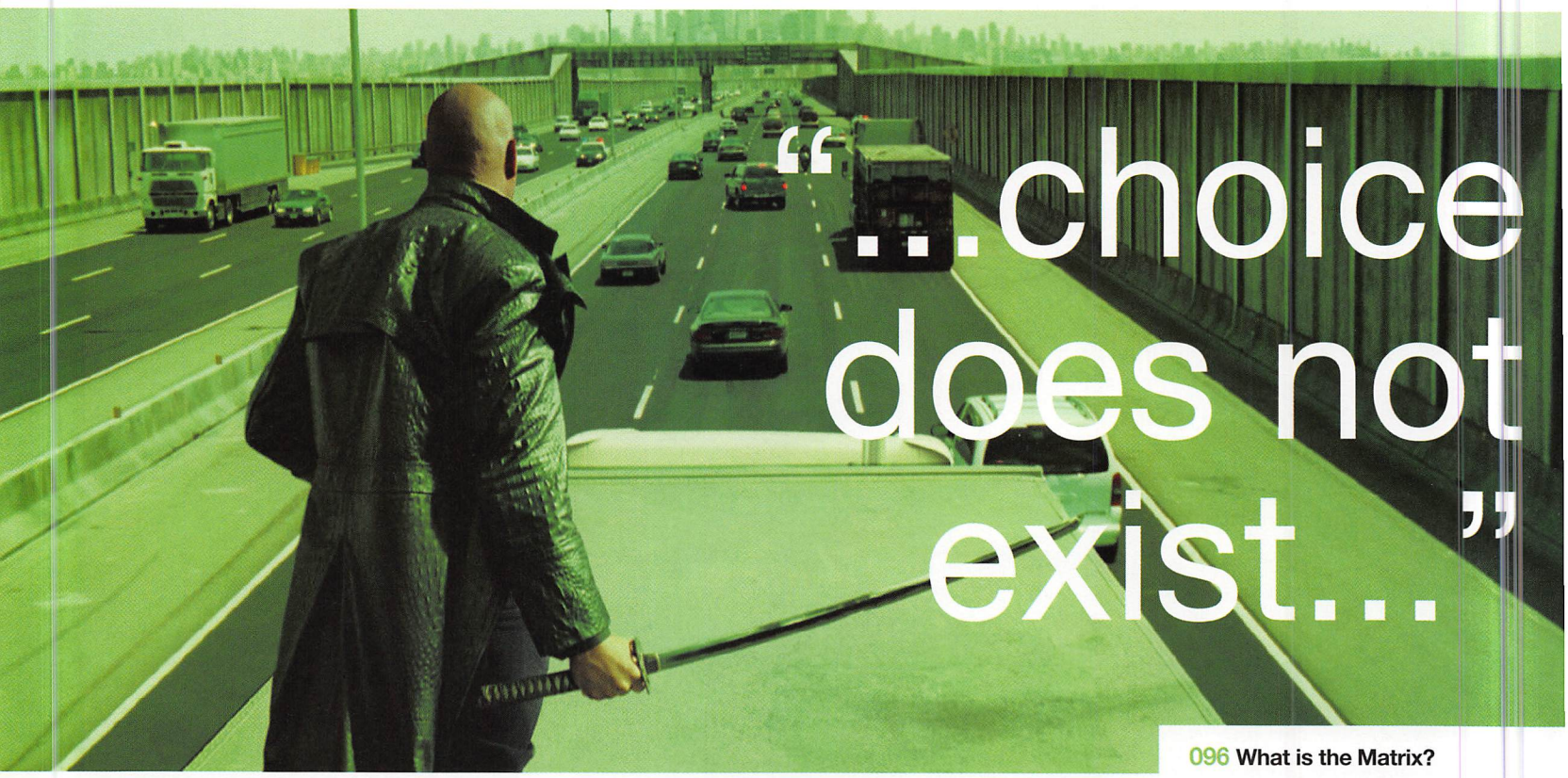

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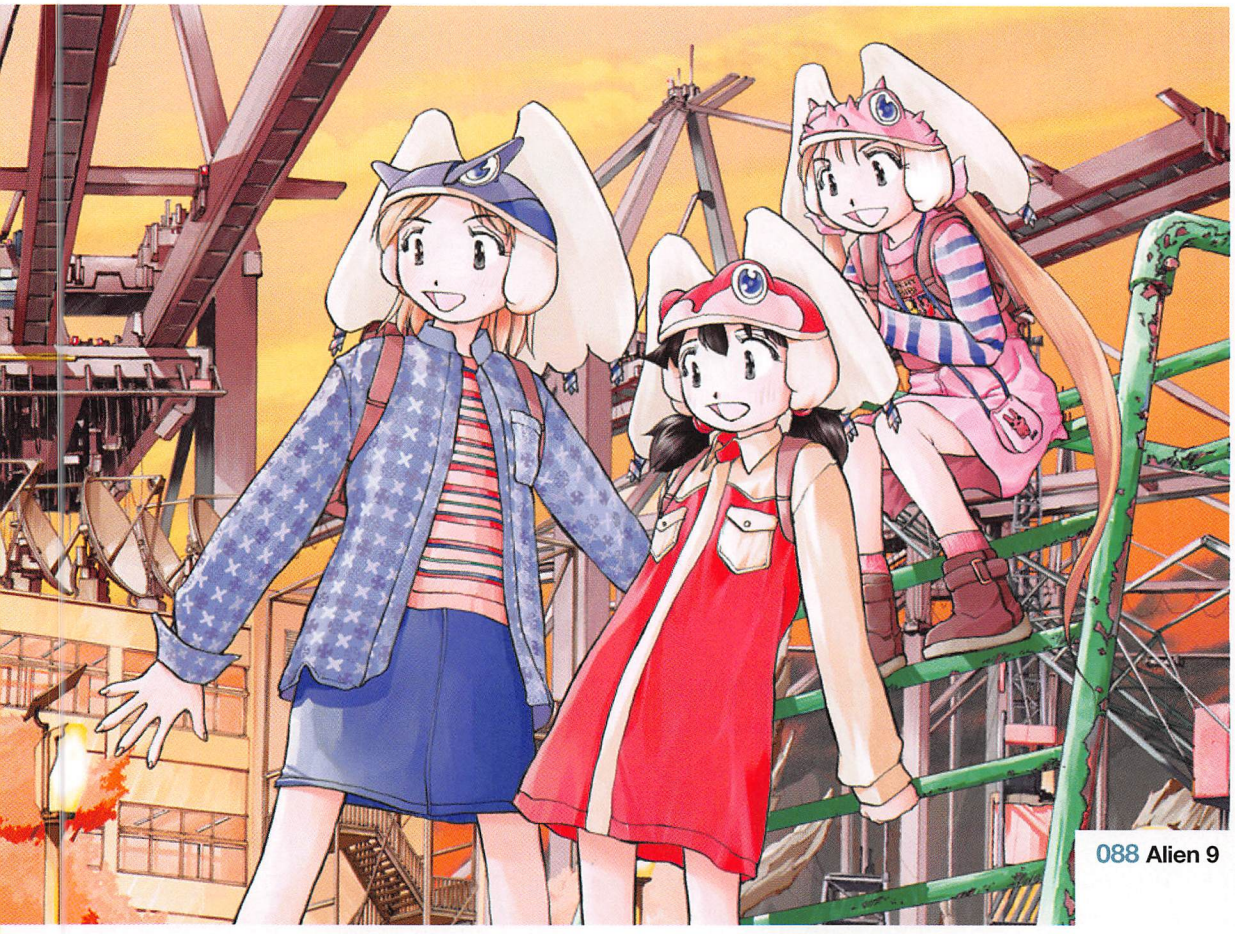

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Blood

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write and win!

If we choose your correspondence as our "letter of the month", you'll receive a one year subscription to **play** magazine gratis. Give us your best thoughts.

Letter of the Month

Saw the offer for thoughts on Zelda. I've been dying to tell SOMEONE, and **play** seems the perfect place.
First, I loved Zelda. The very first time I even saw the cartoon version of Link, I was horrified, and I stayed horrified (albeit less so, as the idea grew on me) until almost a month ago when I read a preview on the game in which the cartoon graphics were described as if the game were 'told' from the point of view of a child. That statement right there converted me instantly to liking the idea of the cartoon graphics, and after seeing them in their glory-filled motion on my own TV, I whole-heartedly agreed. Not only did the graphics fit the mood, but they actually conveyed meaning and feeling. The first instant I saw the greyed, dead ruin of Hyrule Castle, I instantly KNEW beyond any doubt that the land was still underwater, frozen in time. I didn't need any text box to tell me that, the graphics did it for me! That in and of itself is stellar work.
Then came the storyline. I went absolutely giddy with amazement as I learned that not only they had pulled in the original idea of a shattered Triforce, but that the Triforce was actually described as three seperate entities as it should be, and that they were actually pulling in other elements such as the symbols on the hand of Link, Zelda, and even Ganondorf! That hasn't been done since the comic books!
However, while the graphics and storyline blew me away, the gameplay, difficulty, and replayability was much less awe-inspiring. While there were very decently crafted puzzles, and I really did have tons of fun playing through the game in three days, the game felt short, and way WAY too easy. In fact, I only 'died' (though I had fairies captured by that point, so I never actually died) a couple of times, one due to a bug that released 40+ monsters at me at once, and the couple other times to the PuppetGanon who, after the amazingly easy rest of the game, was insanely difficult by comparison (including to Ganon himself). The rest of the game was entirely too easy. Link had insane amounts of health, and recieved little to no damage from those few attacks that did manage to connect with him.
On top of that, while I was ecstatic to learn that they had a 'second quest' built into the game, it was a sore disappointment to find that the only thing that had changed was the dialogue and Link's clothes when I had been hoping for a much more challenging game, ala the original Zelda.
While I thoroughly enjoyed The Wind Waker, it was not a perfect game, and left me with a feeling of "But they could have done so much more!" at the end. Insanely fun while it lasted, but it lasted a very short time.

Joel King

Pro Link

I hope I don't sound like a stupid fan of everything Zelda, but here it goes. The Wind Waker is the best Zelda I've played since Link to the Past on the Super Nintendo. I've played almost all of them since, but Wind Waker has style to spare. As was said in your review of the game its not child like, it's viewed from the eyes of a child. I stand by that.
Anyone who wants to argue over the graphics I just ask to look at that free copy of Ocarina they should have picked up. Remember when it came out for N64? Top of the line graphics, everyone was in awe of it and its realism. Now what? It looks dated, with bad aliasing. Wind Waker will never have that problem as it's an artistic style. It's abstract, not realistic. I think the only thing that better tech could improve with the game is anti-aliasing. And really, how much smoother need it look?
But everyone should be able to look past the graphics. Because at its core is the Zelda gameplay that made me fall in love with the original. Minus the sword beam. That, as a matter of fact, is my only complaint about the game. I've played it through, gotten my extras and started again. And I bet I'm not the only one.

Ken Ayers

No wind in the sails

I have mixed feelings about the game. I really tried to get into the game but due to the graphics I'd expect in a game made for a 5 year old child I simply can't. I can't fall into the fantasy world of Zelda with such crayola looking graphics. I only own a GameCube as my current console system of choice. Maybe it's due to the fact that I'm 31 but I simply think the graphics in Zelda are just to much a turn off for me to overcome as I own the game but rarely play it anymore. I think Nintendo fubared big time. The crazy thing is I love anime but still can't stand the shell shaded graphics in Zelda: The Wind Waker.

Eddie

Pro Link V2

In a recent issue you requested opinions from readers on the new Zelda game, The Wind Waker. Since I own the game and have had more then enough time to form an adequate opinion I thought I'd give my two cents. Wind Waker is one of the most enjoyable games released in recent years. It has a fun and yet deep storyline that's completely involving and definitely holds up to it's predecessors in the series. One of the biggest aspects of the series has always been exploration and the developers have definitely delivered in that department. Oftentimes it will take me at least an hour to travel to the next necessary location on the map, just for the joy of exploring what's along the way. The biggest area of concern for gamers though has been the graphics. I admit, as a hardcore fan of Zelda and having beaten every title in the series up until now, I was not only disappointed but angry with what the developers were delivering. It appeared as if they were marketing Link to the five years of age and under crowd and that the newest installment would have nothing to offer the older gamers who have been around since the beginning. All I can say is that eventually my love of the series and my faith in Nintendo finally persuaded me to try the game and in motion I have to admit that the graphics are not only passable but wonderful. Link is the most expressive game character yet rendered in a video game and he serves to draw the player into the game to a remarkable degree and the world around him is alive with movement and things of wonder to see and experience. My suggestion to gamers is try the game first before you judge it, it's only fair and it's only reasonable and I guarantee you'll be as happy with it as I am.

Jeremy Berg

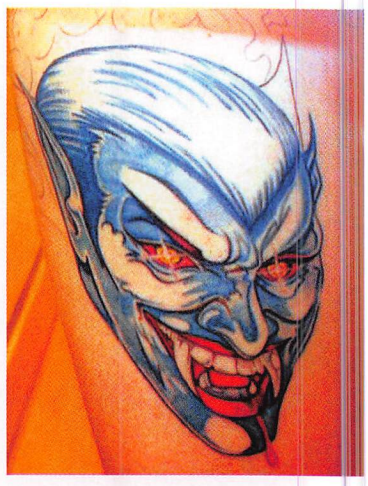
All totalled, the new Link fans over powered the Link detractors by about 70/30 in response to the May issue's survey. So it would seem the new Picasso Link has legs, albeit short.

Tattoo you

LONG time reader, really love the new mag, it's great. Here's a pic of my Castlevania tattoo. It's REALLY killer, not some cheesy crap. I think your readers would love to see it.

Peace,
Ben I.

Thanks, man... Any more game-related tattoos out there? Let's see 'em...



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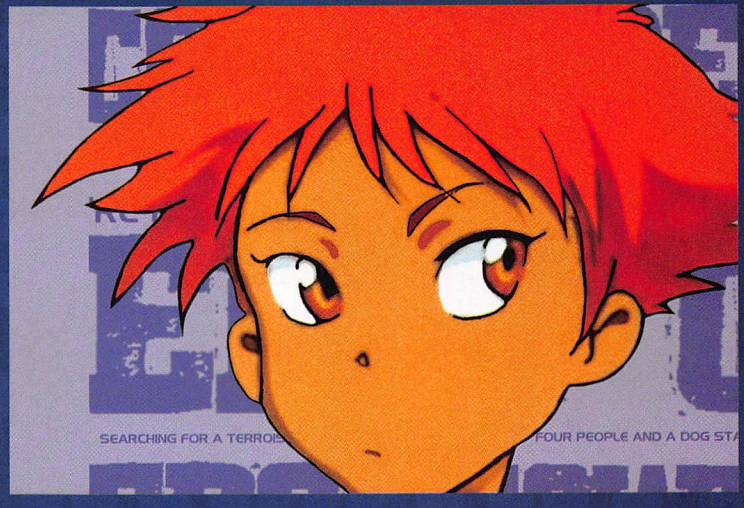

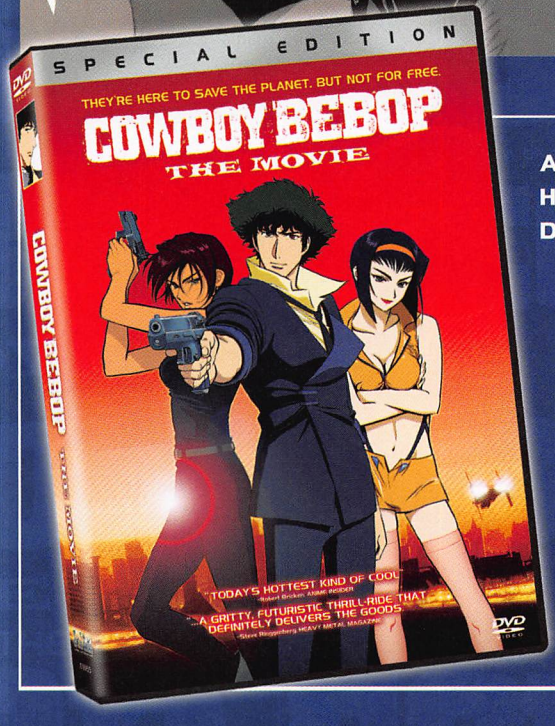

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Blood and Gore
Violence

Game Experience May
Change During Online Play

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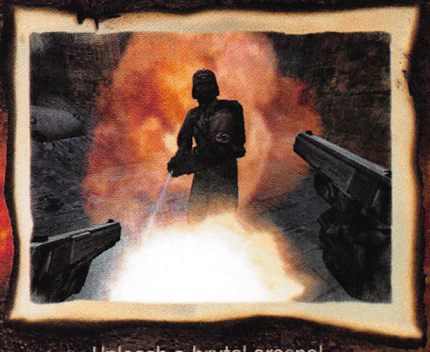

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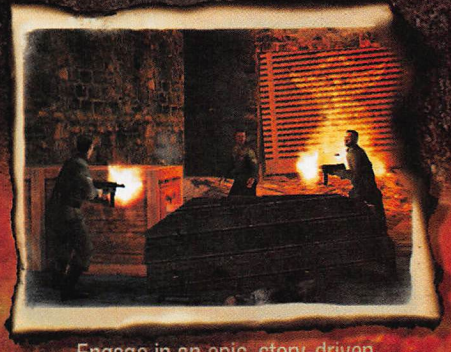

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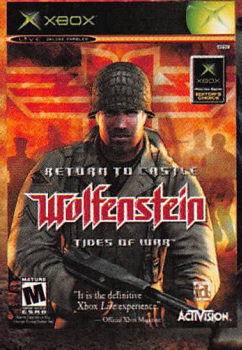

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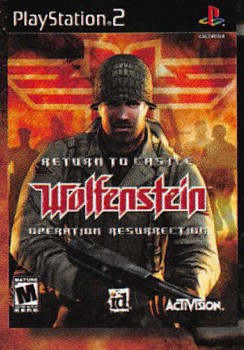

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Phantom Quest

Infinium's not-so-little black box is on the edge of reality

Pouring out of the limo into the offsite meeting with Infinium Labs COO Robert Shambro and CMO Burton Roberts, I thought I had a pretty good idea what the Phantom was, or at least what I thought it needed to be to succeed. Imagine my surprise learning I was about 80 percent on the money. First of all, no one in their right mind would release a new console to compete with Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo these days. To do so would be to fail on a massive scale. There is, however, room in the market for a new delivery device, which essentially is exactly what Infinium Labs are planning. After picking up your Phantom online or via your local cable provider, you set the box atop your TV, much like a Tivo, plug it into an Ethernet port (keyboard, mouse and controller included), and presto, you're ready to play. Play what? Well, here's where it gets interesting. Imagine combing down a list of available PC games and buying them right then and there; no fuss, no muss. The game goes on your monthly statement and it's yours. For the publisher, this can only be good, right? They didn't have to package it or ship it, after all, or fight for shelf space, which is getting increasingly harder to get.

Okay, possible glitches in the Matrix: will the Phantom handle the big games and run them optimally? What about the retailers; won't they freak? Well, there's two ways to look at it. If Doom III hits on Phantom the same day as retail, they may have issues. However, they shouldn't have issues with games retailers don't stock or that have been out for awhile... Obviously, this is part of the equation that needs to be fleshed out.

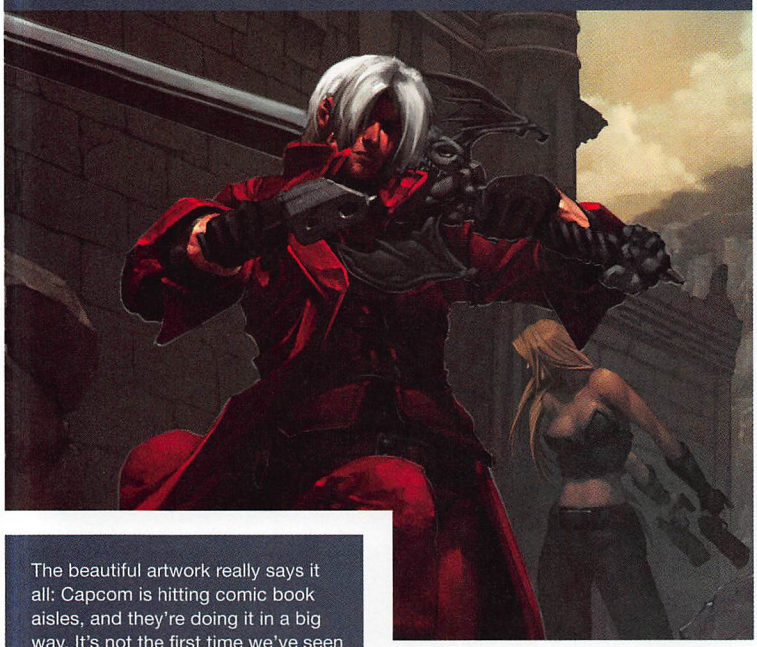
Besides playing PC games (including MMORPGs – and no, you won't lose accrued experience) in the comfort of your living room, however, the most exciting thing about The Phantom is Infinium's ability to release games from small or new developers that can't get a publishing deal. Say, for instance, a game like Tork gets cancelled and it's nearly ready for market. All Tiwak (the developer) would need to do is convert the code to Open GL and make their deal with Infinium and you're playing Tork exclusively on The Phantom. This is what they meant when they claimed it ran any format. Theoretically, this is true, provided developers can get their Xbox, PS2 and GameCube-developed games running on the Phantom hardware. This question has been posed to our developer friends, so stay tuned. Presuming they can, what a great opportunity for up-and-coming developers this would be. Next, imagine games like Blinx or Panzer Dragoon Orta that have been pulled from shelves to make room for new product. Wouldn't it be great to be able to purchase discount games up to a year after they've gone off sale? And so it goes... Beyond these applications, the console will also deliver children's content (so they no longer need to be tethered to the home PC; another great idea), music, videos, films, you name it.

Infinium are going to debut the console at the first ever UGE (Ultimate Gamers Expo) this August 15-17 at the Los Angeles Convention Center (www.ugexpo.com.) and from there send us betas to test and provide feedback for, with plans to have the console available by Q2 2004. Pricing, availability, and the other zillion questions you have (it has a massive hard drive, by the way) remain TBA.

"First of all, no one in their right mind would release a new console to compete with Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo these days. To do so would be to fail on a massive scale"

Thou art Capcom

the capcom universe comes to comics in style



The beautiful artwork really says it all: Capcom is hitting comic book aisles, and they're doing it in a big way. It's not the first time we've seen video game comics, and not even the first time we've seen Capcom do it (remember Malibu's Street Fighter comic that hit about a decade ago?), but it's never looked this spectacular before.

Dreamwave Productions, the company best known for its best-selling Transformers revival, is preparing a lineup that's practically a who's-who of the Capcom universe. In September, Mega Man will be the first title out the gate, and it'll be followed in October by a Maximo one-shot. Then in January 2004 comes Devil May Cry, which could be the hottest series of the bunch. Featuring the Transformers creative team of writer Brad Mick and art genius Pat Lee, DMC's initial story arc is planned to retell and expand upon the first DMC game, while fleshing out the story and further exploring its characters. Darkstalkers and Rival Schools are slated for sometime in 2004.

However, Dreamwave isn't the only player in Capcom's plan for comic store domination. Image Comics and UDON Entertainment have nabbed the license for Street Fighter...and really, what more do you need to know? It promises to offer the butt-kicking action of the Street Fighter series, complemented by gorgeous anime-style art. The regular Street Fighter series starts in September, with a preview book available in August.

To say we're looking forward to these is putting it mildly.

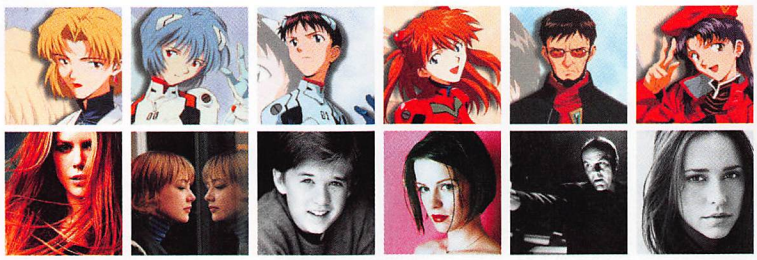
Evangelion Live!

can the most philosophical anime of all time be tamed for live action?

Anime fans the world over are likely reeling (or sobbing madly) from the news that one of the greatest anime epics of all time, "Neon Genesis Evangelion," is being made into a big-budget feature film. And like so many Tolkien fans prior to Peter Jackson's epic, they're probably wondering how in the world ADV and company hope to pull it off. Announcing the new venture at this year's Cannes Film Festival, ADV President Jon Ledford provided half of the answer, stating the project is a collaboration between ADV Films, Gainax and Weta Workshop, the New Zealand-based special effects studio that created the effects for the Lord of the Rings trilogy. With Gainax, ADV and Weta on board, all signs point toward a possible cinematic revelation akin to LoTR for anime fans, as well the millions who haven't been touched by this amazing story.

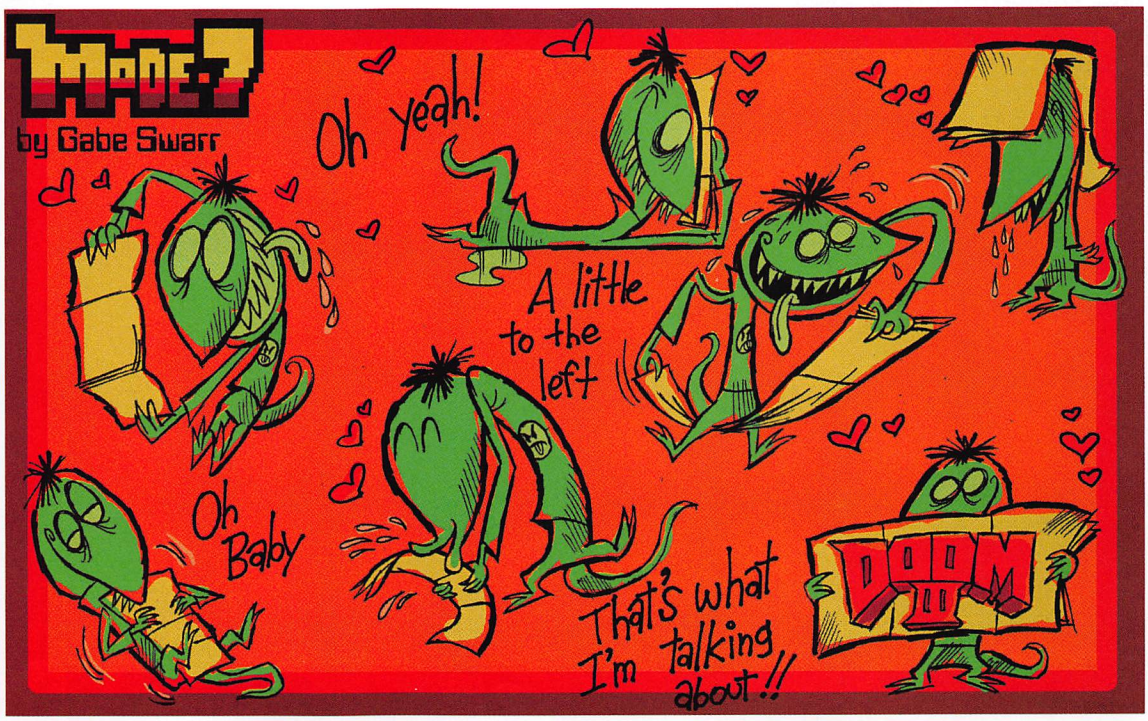
"The three main players here represent something of a 'dream-team' for a project like this one," said Ledford. "Between the quality and significance of the Gainax title, Weta's industry-leading skill in the creation of special visual effects, and our expertise in the marketing and promotion of anime and anime-related content, this project is truly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

Regarding a possible release date, the film is in the earliest stages of development, although the timetable is said to be an aggressive one. We'll of course update you regularly with further details. In the meantime who can resist casting the leading roles? Not us!

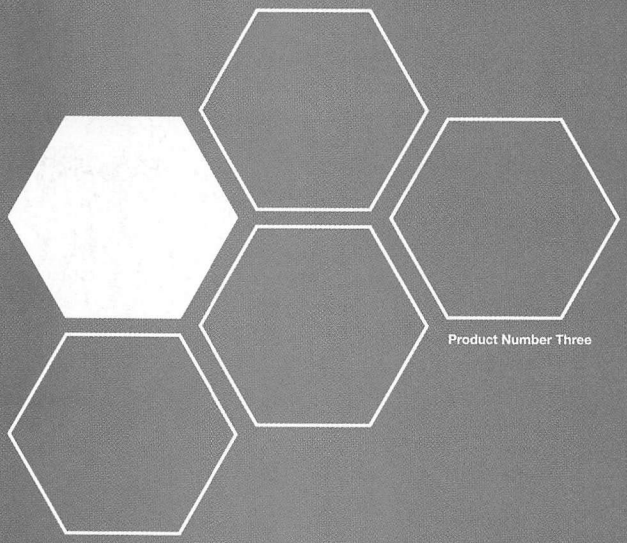


Eva dream cast

Ritsuko Akagi: Nicole Kidman
Rei Ayanami: Oksana Akinshina
Shinji Ikari: Haley Joel Osment
Asuka Langley Soryu: Kate Beckinsale
Gendo Ikari: Michael Ironside
Misato Katsuragi: Jennifer Love Hewitt
Pen Pen: (gotta be CG)



play games



P.N.03

For Vanessa Z. Schneider, revenge is not only at hand; it shoots out of them.

words dave halverson

There always has, and always will be, a segment of gaming reserved for those who reside within the rhythm of the code, with the ability to see through the surface to the undercurrent of games like P.N. 03, where a unique fusion with the action onscreen awaits anyone who can channel its hues. On the other side of the spectrum are those who crave the pick-up-and-play satisfaction of any number of mainstream video games, conveniently scripted to appease whoever is parked at the other end of the controller. Thankfully, Capcom makes games that appeal to both. One of P.N. 03's many virtues is that it's just easy enough for the average gamer to digest, while possessing the necessary layers to make it a perfect game for seasoned action junkies looking for another game on which to hone their skills. It also stars the most gorgeous female to ever grace a video game; a little bonus, there.

The game stars Vanessa Z. Schneider, a gun for hire in the distant future, commissioned by a mysterious client to investigate the colonies on Öde, where machines called CAMS have assumed control—the same machines responsible for the death of Vanessa's parents. What little story resides within this beautiful game's intermissions—presented in Metal Gear-like message windows—though terse, blossoms into a sci-fi twist worthy of a feature film. Production Studio 4's first gift for the GameCube is exactly that—a gift—albeit one of tactical action: intense duck-and-cover shooting against a very intelligent mechanized enemy.

Slinky cyber suits that plug directly into Vanessa's spinal cord work as the catalyst on which the pristine action resides, turning her perfect body into a sumptuous killing machine that looks so good dispensing violence you want to scoop her out of the screen and propose. Her perfect round bottom shakes and sways with so much grace it borders on illegal and when she engages her Energy Drive she contorts like a death ballerina. If Kobayashi (producer on Resident Evil Zero) set out to create the world's most beautiful female video game character, he has certainly succeeded. Immeasurably more elegant then Lara, her seemingly perfect in-game model rivals that of GunValkyrie's Kelly-O, yet another in-game celebration of the female form. Bravo to Japanese character design; this type of beauty only comes from one place.

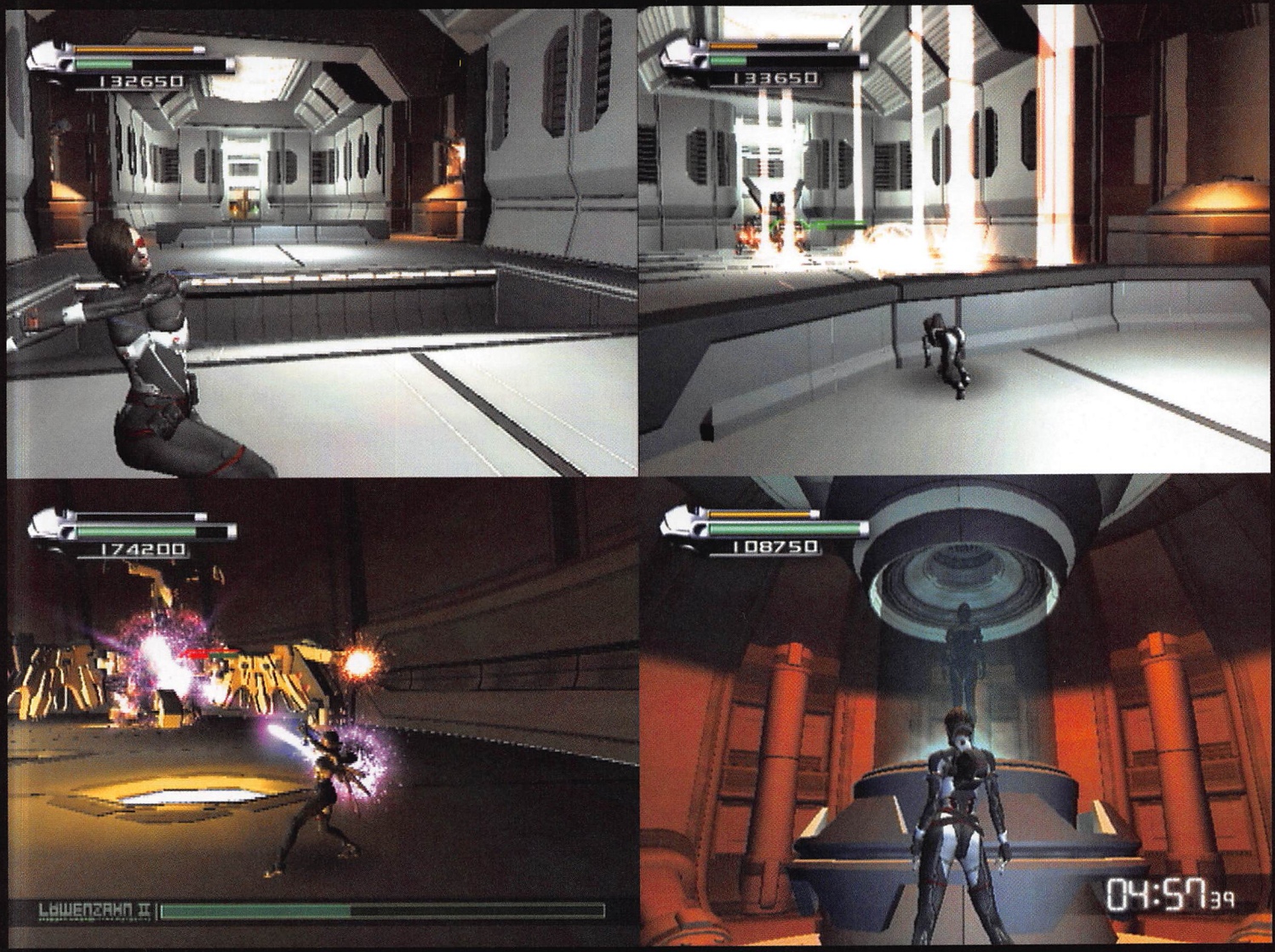
P.N. 03 is a very unique brand of action shooter; in fact, I can't

think of another title quite like it, given variables within the game. Vanessa, for instance, doesn't control like one might imagine. Sideways movement is restricted to a left or right spin or double-tap cartwheel—no standard strafing included—with the left analog stick assigned to strictly forward movement and a reverse twirl. The A button shoots Vanessa's palm shot (she has no gun; she is the gun), Y ducks (and rolls) and B jumps. On the other side of the equation, the mechanized enemy is ruthlessly cunning, making this a game of inches. Exchanges without the benefit of cover require mastery of Vanessa's skills, and even though barriers are placed strategically in places where the environments don't provide cover, once the enemy knows where you are, they work swiftly to annihilate your safe spot, creating a man (or woman in this case) vs. machine exchange that gets under your skin and stays there.

A great deal of your success relies upon which suits you choose and how much you are able to power them up based on your performance within each level. Racking up combos and no-damage clears is essential if you're to survive the onslaught, especially as you assail the ranks from easy to normal to hard. First kill in a given setting sets the combo countdown in motion, then subsequent kills in the allotted seconds reset it, and on and on. Nick twelve enemies in succession and you're halfway to a new suit—easy in theory, difficult in execution. As a rule, it's best to wound several targets to the brink before stringing together a massive combo. Bear in mind, however, CAMS are able to appear out of thin air, so if you're moving towards a stationary target and you hear a machine warp in behind you, well, it's time for a new strategy or, better yet, a little gift from the Energy Drive. Vanessa's suit(s) can be powered up in five ways: enhancing her Palm Shot, Barrier strength, Automatic Drive (limited to suits that offer it), Energy and Energy Drive capacity. One Energy Drive attack comes standard with each suit, ranging in type from limited invincibility to spectacular ranged attacks, which chew up their respective energy, replenished by extinguishing adversaries. The Palm Shot is a nifty tool, but nothing says "I love you" like the Intera Fusion's Tengu attack or any number of Vanessa's specials. Each attack carries its own drool-inducing animation—a collection of super moves that stand as the best-looking ever devised—simply unmatched in their fluidity and utterly perfect animation. It astounds me that they didn't use motion capture to create these amazing actions.

"The palm shot is a nifty tool but nothing says "I love you" like the Intera Fusion's Tengu attack or any number of Vanessa's specials"

Speaking of the Tengu attack, there it is now... To attain true oneness with Vanessa, however, you must possess her entire wardrobe



Bosses in the game are large, metallic and extremely aggressive...

Where most modern games derive fun and length from complexity, P.N. 03 employs the old-school approach, which is fun and length through mastery and addiction. Once you synch up with Vanessa and the rhythm of the game, it's impossible to put down and clearly meant to be assailed three times (or more), which is also the only path to unlocking every suit and the secrets within. It certainly doesn't hurt that the soundtrack is the best since Symphony of the Night, but the visual style is also worthy of an award. The inner sanctums of the colony are Kubrickian in design, antiseptic, and flawlessly contoured, emitting a sense of desolation that's uncanny against the bleak occupation of the CAMS. Outside the confines of the fortress, the outer regions are a windswept no-man's land, where subtle shades of green and brown coat an atmosphere you can cut with a knife. In the instances you get a glimpse of the surrounding colony, Western sci-fi influences from Cameron to Spielberg adorn the cold exterior of the city. If nothing else, P.N. 03 is a work of art from beginning to end.

P.N. 03 is the type of exclusive content Nintendo used to hang their hats on, although these days it's anyone's guess whether the 'Cube faithful will help make Vanessa a household name or just another passing vixen. If Nintendo really has the mature residual coming off the SNES and 64, which I believe they do, these skilled and obviously post-teen gamers should come out of the woodwork for such old-school mastery, which would assuredly lead to sequels. If I were to choose a contingent able to appreciate such a game, I would pick the GameCube faithful just as Capcom has (one can only imagine what GunValkyrie, JSRF and Panzer Dragoon Orta would have done if they had had the benefit Nintendo's more seasoned user base). On the other hand, if P.N. 03 doesn't achieve the status it deserves, it may be a sign that mature gamers are migrating to PS2 and Xbox...an interesting conundrum, certainly worth keeping an eye on, which may be difficult when they're both fixed on Vanessa's backside.

- **system:** gamecube
- **developer:** capcom
- **publisher:** capcom
- **available:** september

A-

Product Number Three

interview

Hiroyuki Kobayashi
Producer, Capcom Production Studio 4

"I like Cameron Diaz a lot too. Vanessa's image is thin like a fashion model but at the same time she has muscles as a mercenary as well."

play: Was P.N. 03 planned as the first shot in Production Studio 4's five-pronged GameCube attack?
Man: P.N. 03 was actually designed last among the five titles. However, it ended up being released first.

So is the studio sharing resources on projects or are you divided into separate teams?
We have five separate teams but share some know-how, because we are all developing games for the GameCube. Some of our staff will move on to other projects upon completion of this game.

Is there a common thread between Viewtiful Joe, Killer 7, Dead Phoenix, RE 4 and P.N.03? Are you and Mikami-san equally involved in each project?
The five titles are totally different, so each project has a different director. Mikami is the executive producer for all five titles and at the same time the director of P.N. 03 and the producer of Killer 7. I am the producer for Resident Evil 4 and P.N. 03.

Vanessa is the best-looking in-game model I have ever seen. It's hard to believe she's polygonal. How complex is the Vanessa model?
The number of polygons used on her during the game is 10,000, and during the demo sequences, 16,000. I am confident that the textures are done well by having 1/4 of the data compressed.

Vanessa has a suit hardwired into her spine and shoots energy from her palms...is she human otherwise?
Since her suit is special, the section of her back opens up when its energy is released. She can also release energy from her palms, and perform special moves by using her whole body. All I can say is she's a female mercenary, the rest is for players to discover.

Rather than giving her standard action/adventure movements, you use the controller like marionette strings. Did you experiment with more conventional control or was this the plan from the beginning?
When we worked on her actions, the direction was that she must fight as if she were dancing; we did not use motion capture for this product. Vanessa's rhythmical movements were achieved through the designer's pursuit for artistic motions.

Is the game somewhat a celebration of the female form? Her Energy Drive moves certainly are spectacular feats of animation and destructive force...
The motion of her Energy Drive was created after doing lots of research on a female dancer's motions. I am very pleased with the outcome.

Capcom seem to be focusing on old-school gameplay brought to life through modern technology. Would you say this is accurate?
We created this game with that idea in mind. However, this is not something that Capcom will focus on for all titles.

Obviously, the long-term value in P.N. 03 comes through mastering the game and its combo system, playing through Easy, carrying over to Normal, and finally to Hard. Which suit do you suggest powering-up on Easy to make Normal more rewarding?
I would recommend a suit that has the Energy Drive "TENGU!"

I was able to link about 12 hits in a combo (38,000 points!). What's the limit?
I think a 12-hit combo would be the limit in an area with lots of enemies.

Your interior designs are truly compelling. Were they at all influenced by Western sci-fi?
The design is close to the images found in popular sci-fi movies, yes.

I love the way you have added collision to Vanessa's palm shots as they hit and kick up dust, sparks, etc. Do you feel fine details like this are important building blocks to immerse the player? How difficult is it to add touches on collision throughout a game?
I think it is an essential element to create an exhilarating action shooter. This is a very important part of the game.

What inspired the CAMS mecha? Did you do research in their design or just go from scratch?
The CAMS design was influenced by many sci-fi works.

How does it feel going from RE Zero to P.N. 03, two very different games? Does it keep you fresh?
It was a nice change to work on a brand new, original title. Though P.N. 03 is different from the Resident Evil series, I hope lots of people will enjoy it.

Do you have a preference between action and adventure...between modern game design and classic game design?
Personally, I like action games and modern game design better.

Will we be seeing more of Vanessa? Is P.N. 03 planned as a franchise?
That is something I am considering. Keep your eyes peeled.

If P.N. 03 were to be made into a movie, we've chosen Natasha Henstridge to play Vanessa in the movie; at first we were thinking Cameron Diaz...but Vanessa's tough. What do you think?
I like Cameron Diaz a lot too. Vanessa's image is thin like a fashion model but at the same time she has muscles as a mercenary as well. I'd say it would be tough to find the perfect Vanessa.

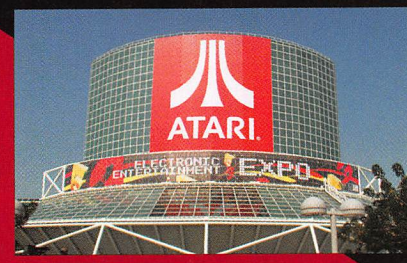
I loved your plot twist at the end. And what an epic last boss. What surprises do you have in store for players who beat all three difficulty settings?
They'll have to find out for themselves!

Finally, I must comment on the choice of music. P.N. 03 has one of the most alluring soundtracks we've heard in years. How closely did the sound designer work with yourself and Mikami-san?
I feel honored to hear your compliments on the music. I agree that the music is really well done. This was the result of the sound designer and Mr. Mikami working very closely to create a compelling musical score.

Thank you for your time and for creating such a bold and stylish action game. GameCube fans the world over would surely like to thank everyone at Production Studio 4 for their amazing contribution to the GameCube.
I really feel honored to hear your words. I will keep on doing my best to create great games. Thank you very much.

electronic entertainment expo 2003

may 14-19
los angeles convention center



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026 game of the show
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E3 2003

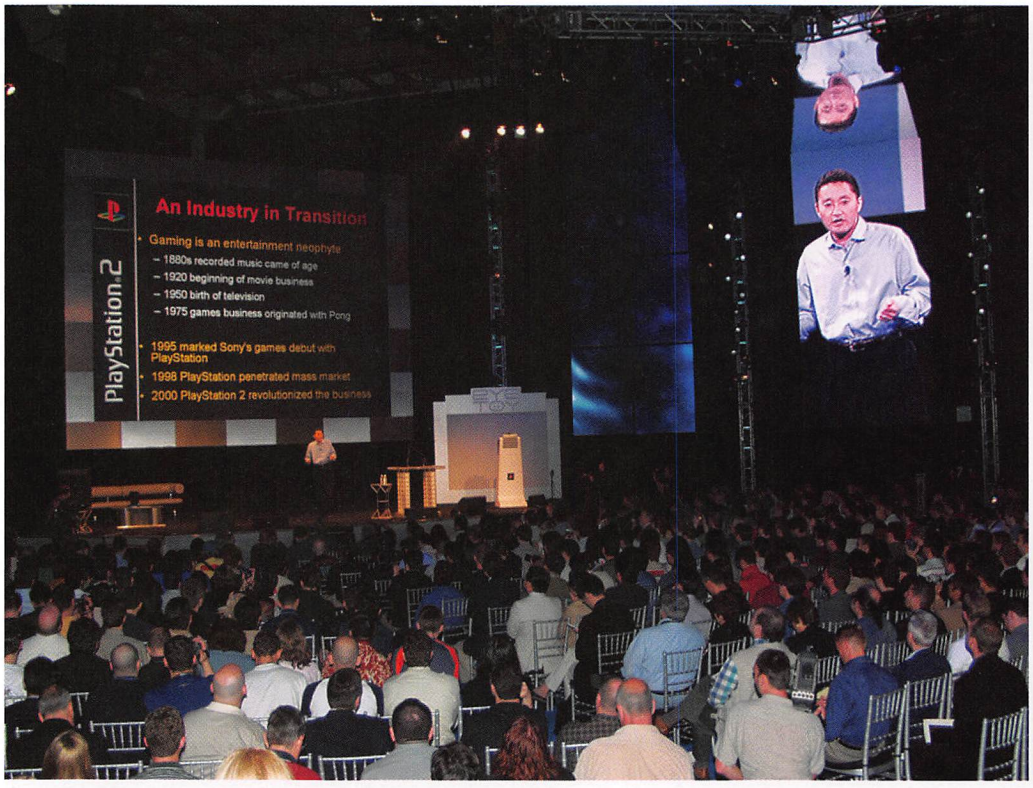
Three days a year the video game industry constructs a giant city unto itself, and we get to cover it, while it covers us

words play magazine staff
photos michael tran

So what is E3 really about? It's about showcasing change, siphoning through everything that's new. It's about a gathering of everything and anything that has to do with video games—the culture, the people, the energy, the way of life. It's about laying out every single scrap of coolness and not-so-coolness that's whipping up this year's gaming hurricane—Electronic Entertainment Expo 2003, the place where over 67,000 industry heavy hitters converge in one very loud, very crowded, very apoplectic spot. And it's about having to be there to grasp it all. That's where **play** comes in: with the following cornucopia of show coverage, we go to the extreme to capture all the sights and sounds of this overloaded celebration of the action-packed months come. We have our opinions, big and small, absurd and dead-on. Who knows where it's all going? And that's just part of the fun.

sony

A new PS2, the first virtual space add-on, and the reinvention of the handheld...all in one very inspiring sitting



Jetting so far into the lead that the very notion of "console wars" has become a retired axiom, Sony Computer Entertainment has blossomed from a video game company in to a multi-media giant, now focused on convergence, compatibility, and community: one big Sony rhythm nation. Sony President Kaz Hirai runs through the numbers like the proud papa of a new era, and indeed they are staggering, with the PS pushing worldwide numbers in the neighborhood of 100 million and the PS2 bridging 50; 19 million in the US alone. They have an exclusive deal with EA that makes them the king of sports, and a deal with AOL to beam games, music, TV and radio directly into the living room, along with AIM Talk connecting the PS2 with millions of AOL users in a massive Instant Messenger super community that'll make Zion look like a studio apartment. A new USB Headset is slated for both on- and off-line gaming (no more turning it down at night) and the exclusive software deals are a drool-inducing assortment of pixel power: Final Fantasy XI, Metal Gear Solid 3 and the next installment in GTA series will all be PS2-exclusive.

Oddly enough, however, that was only the beginning. They also marched out the new Eye Toy, an affordable onboard USB camera that literally inserts players into the game by displaying their image onscreen and letting them control the action in virtual space. Looking like Tom Cruise in Minority Report, anyone can do this, with software ranging from window watching to belting ninjas out of mid-air. While imagining the possibilities for this device, SCEI President Ken Kutaragi marched out the 800 lb. gorilla to eat all 800 lb. gorillas: Sony's new baby, the mega shock of not only E3 but the decade—their new handheld, "the Walkman of the 21st century," the PSP. Besides playing dedicated games on its 16 X 9 LCD backlit screen using brand new 3D technology on 1.8 GB mini-discs, the PSP supports USB 2.0, MPEG4, Memory Stick, and has a rechargeable lithium-ion battery source, making it a platform for every type of media from movies to music to games to data transport. And let's not forget Sony's new PS2 Online Pack, with new DVD functionality like a built-in IR receiver, DVD-R, progressive scan playback, a new quieter fan, and the included broadband appliance for $199, making the PS2 the ultimate DVD player to boot. I'm pretty sure that next year they'll announce a way to cook food with it. Sony is like the Lakers with a Shaq/Kobe cloning machine.

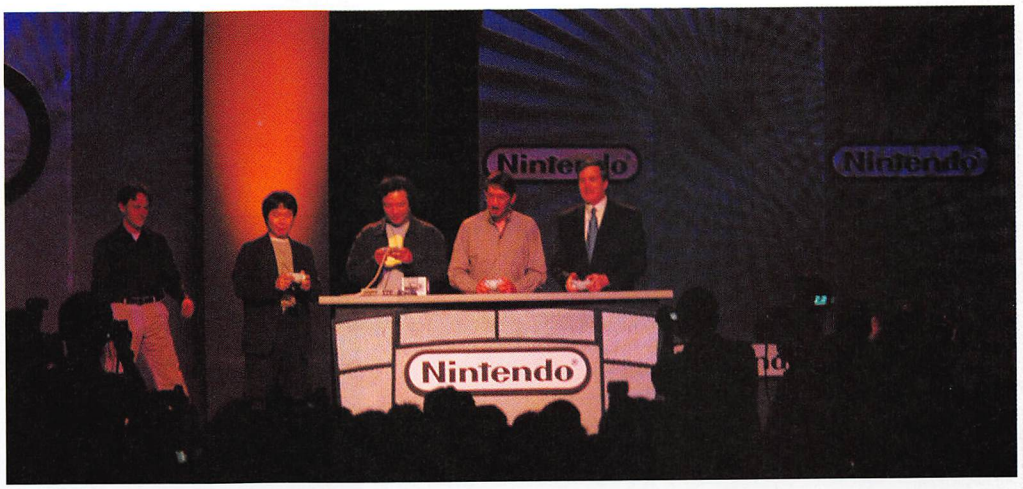
"...the mega shock of not only E3 but the decade—their new handheld, 'the Walkman of the 21st century,' the PSP"

nintendo

A deer in the headlights or ready to pounce? You make the call

What a strange trip the Nintendo press conference was. Had I been pulled into a parallel universe or was I really hearing and seeing relics like Pac-Man being dug up for play on my GameCube? That I was. Completely befuddled by recent events, Nintendo resorted to some weird science I can only imagine is a holding pattern while they re-group. The focus is now obviously on being first in the next wave of consoles, and doing it better, with an eye on expandability and the maturing marketplace. We will undoubtedly see new Nintendo hardware at next year's event. Until then, the master plan is connectivity, gathering people and GBAs around the Cube like a purple campfire. Get four people with GBAs over to your pad and through the magic of the Cube you can play old Atari 5200 Pac-Man or yet another incarnation of A Link to the Past...the latter of which lets you drop off the world map into caverns and the like on the GBA screen, which is pretty cool, provided you crave more adventures in this thrice-visited series. The big question is whom these games are aimed at: rich kids with a hankering for retro gaming or Brady-sized clans with old-school gaming addictions? As weird as that was, however—and it was—all was not lost as Miyamoto announced one more surprise... As I let out a healthy sigh of relief, thinking I was about to witness the evolution of a genre (would it be a new Kid Icarus, a third-person Metroid, or the long awaited re-emergence of DKC on console?) it was like a knee to the groin when the granddaddy of game design marched out...the creator of The Sims (to me, the anti-Christ of gaming)! I'd have bolted for the door if not for the super-dark Metal Gear Solid: Twin Snakes (which was exciting until I saw MGS3) and Resident Evil 4 videos. In fact, Capcom's Production Studio 4 is one of Nintendo's biggest causes for celebration in 2003. Though the first-party spread is the weakest in a decade, PS4's exclusive GC offerings (PN 03, RE4, Viewtiful Joe, Killer 7 and Dead Phoenix) are a beckon of hope in a somewhat hazy year for the champions of gaming. The trio of Square games (FF Tactics Advance, Sword of Mana, and the GBA-tethered Crystal Chronicles) is another bright spot in the GC arsenal, as is Wario World; now even more a treasure than previously considered. Of course, F-Zero GX, Mario Kart Double Dash, and Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour all carried the Nintendo tradition of quality but the desire for such games seems to be weakening. The GBA side of the equation was bright as usual (even in the wake of the PSP), and the show-stopping Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Strike exhibited the GameCube running at its absolute best...so it wasn't a total bust, just an off-year for the usually ovation-filled press event. It's going to be a solid year for Nintendo, laced with the usual hits, but it's easy to see they are not so happy with their current market share.

"the master plan is connectivity, gathering people and GBAs around the Cube like a purple campfire"



microsoft

Remeniscent of the Sega of old, only bigger, smarter and well-funded, X marks the spot for bold first-party content

"earning gamers' trust and building on that foundation by first and foremost keeping their eye on quality and branding"

Microsoft and their Xbox philosophy are utterly fascinating. Initially regarded as too cold and steely for the console world, they began by championing the kind of hardcore Japanese games their naysayers thrived on, like GunValkyrie, Jet Set Radio Future, and Panzer Dragoon Orta, which they followed up by launching an exclusive brand of their own from one of Japan's most renowned game designers: Naoto Ohshima, the co-creator of Sonic the Hedgehog. The under-appreciated (yet highly successful) Blinx: The Time Sweeper made it clear that Microsoft's console arm is not about overnight domination, selling out, or buying its way to success, but about creating and licensing great games on the world's most powerful game console, earning gamers' trust and building on that foundation by first and foremost keeping their eye on quality and branding. This was pretty much the credo at this year's E3. Aside from placing too much emphasis on the company's first foray into broaching the game spectrum, the Music Maker (see inset), Microsoft seemed comfortable in their skin, as well they should be. They have the best games (MGS's Conker: Live & Uncut, Sudeki, BC, Halo 2, Voodoo Vince, Fable, Project Gotham Racing 2, and a swell sports lineup headed by Top Spin Tennis round out the strongest first-party lineup perhaps ever by any one company) and literally every multi-console game is best on the 'Box. Numbers aside, that's the fact, Jack. Microsoft could care less about Sony or Nintendo in respect to any "war" and are focused instead on expanding their Xbox Live audience and continuing to make great games: the tried and true recipe for long-term success. They also announced yet another price drop, bringing the Xbox down to a tempting $179.99. We did expect a better showing from Rare (Kameo was beautiful but somewhat disappointing, as was the overly simplistic Grabbed by the Ghoulies) but Conker saved the day as only he can. Rare needs to break out the Battletoads at next year's E3 or give team green a rebate.

overall game of the show

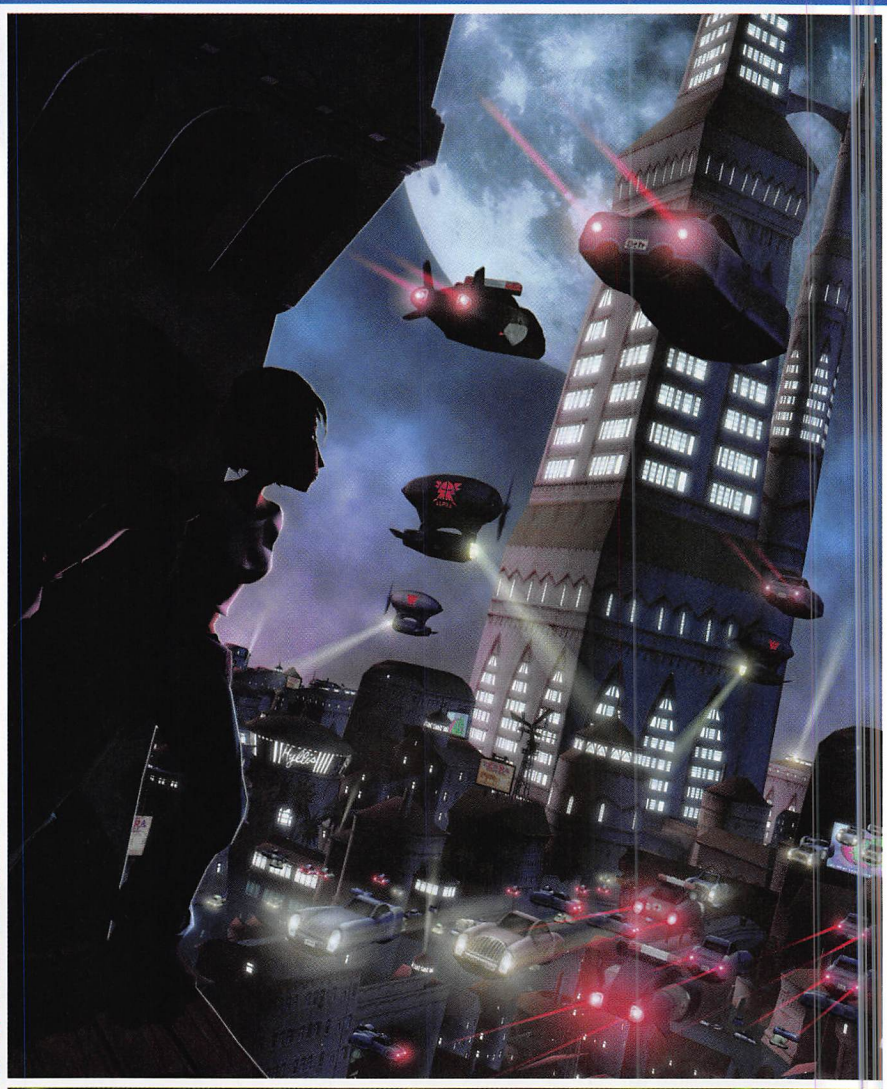
Ubi Soft visionary Michel Ancel presents his latest epic; limbs included

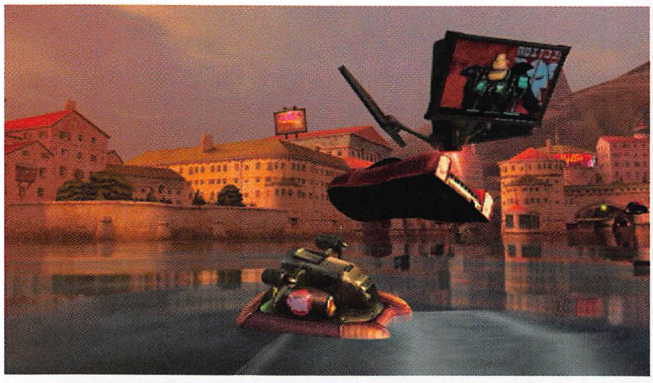
Beyond Good and Evil

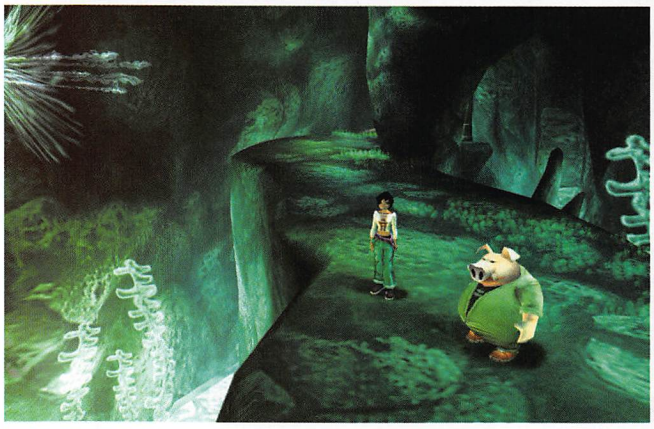
• **developer:** ubi soft • **publisher:** ubi soft • **available:** october

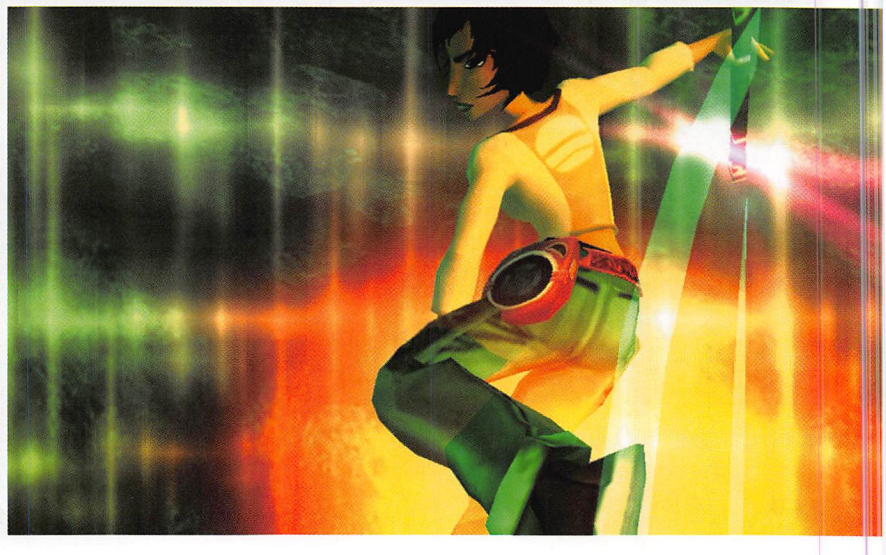
At last year's E3, Rayman creator Michel Ancel gave us a brief glimpse into something we knew would be epic (deemed simply project BG&E). Renowned for re-inventing categories (first with the original Rayman for the Jaguar, Saturn and PlayStation, followed by Rayman 2: The Great Escape for the Dreamcast), Michel infuses his games with a sense of wonder that is a commodity unto himself: the Miyamoto of European game design. Having taken Rayman the distance in both Ds, the dawn of the PS2, GameCube and Xbox saw Michel retreat to his studio to once again conceive his ultimate vision akin the latest technology. The game he has emerged with can only be described as a once in a lifetime gaming experience. You won't get this twice on the current crop of consoles, so relish every second of it.

Beyond Good & Evil is a seamless "world" game like no other, where you play the part of Jade, an investigative reporter on a quest to uncover a government conspiracy and liberate her people. This setting not only introduces the element of field reporting (snapping secret photos and getting publishers to print them as proof) to adventuring, but sets the stage for a journey that mere words cannot describe. The only reason Beyond Good & Evil isn't generating Halo-sized buzz is because it's the kind of game you can't begin to fathom at a trade show. We were lucky enough to sit down with Michel, who, realizing this, seems to be counting the days until people can begin to experience his latest creation. Although cross-platform (therefore best on Xbox, then GameCube, then PS2), the game takes each console beyond its limits. This year's game of the show was a no-brainer.



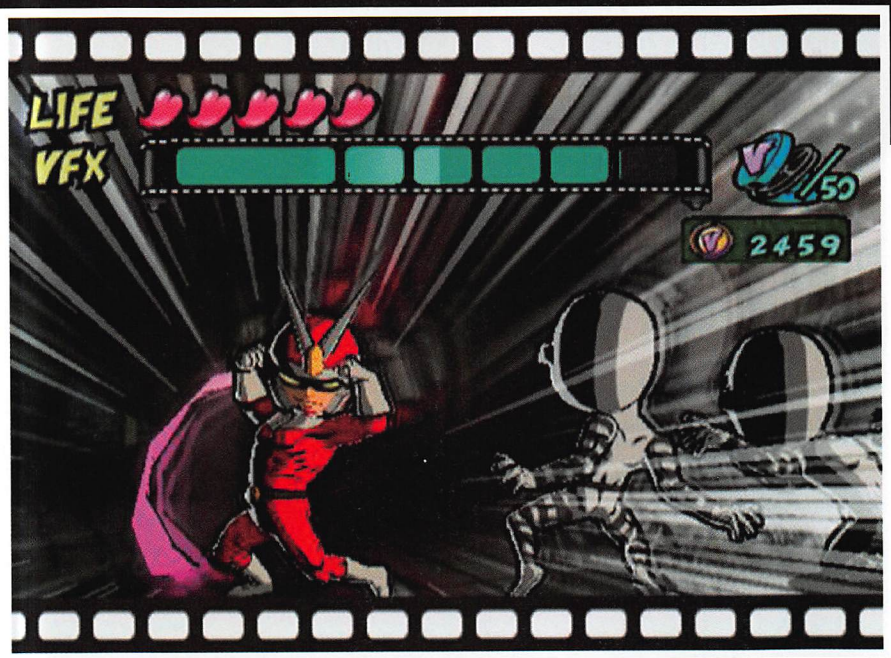






gamecube game of the show

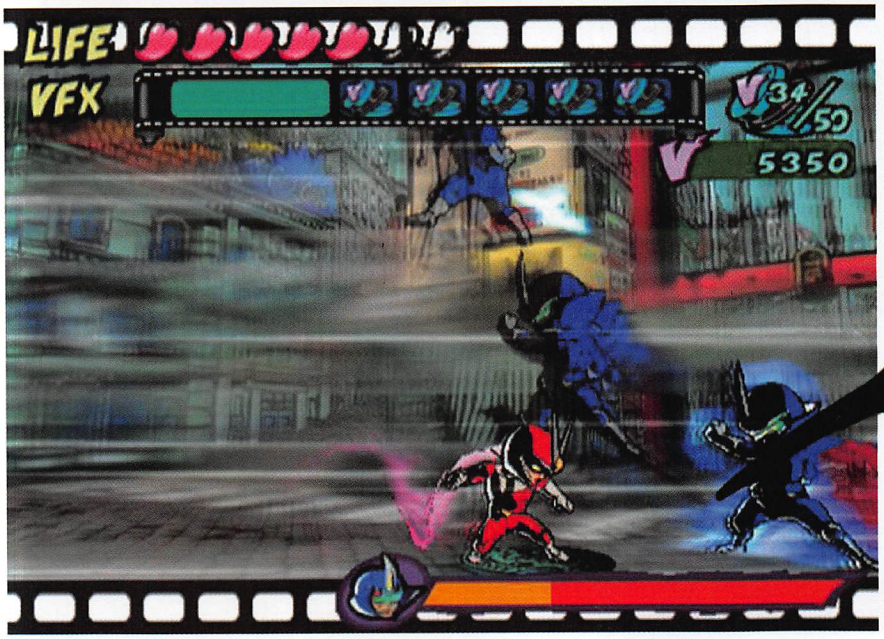
Capcom turns a regular Joe into a side-scrolling work of art



Viewtiful Joe

• **developer:** capcom studio 4 • **publisher:** capcom • **available:** october

The best thing to hit the Cube since Zelda, or perhaps ever depending on who you talk to, Viewtiful Joe is so extraordinary, it's nearly impossible to describe. Imagine massive layered dioramas inhabited by a Fred Durst-looking "regular Joe" who becomes a caped crusader that makes Batman look like the poster child for family values and you're on your way. From the creator of Devil May Cry, it's twisted, it's different, and it may just usher in a while new era of 2D game design. The game's main hook—like the whole game isn't a hook—isn't just beating down evil, but looking beautiful doing it. Joe can speed up or slow down the action to view his beautiful style by filling up his special effects gauge and then, when the need arises (like to dodge or deflect bullets), slip into super slow-motion mode where the game takes on a never-before-seen look and feel. In fact, the entire game "feels" incredible. The control is like a dream and the superhero device is exaggerated splendidly, from Joe's superhero mentor (sporting a prego beer belly and a massive outty) to the manic diorama action, which takes on such a vivid life of its own it's almost a new genre unto itself. Viewtiful Joe's not only the GC game of the show, but will likely end up action game of the year.

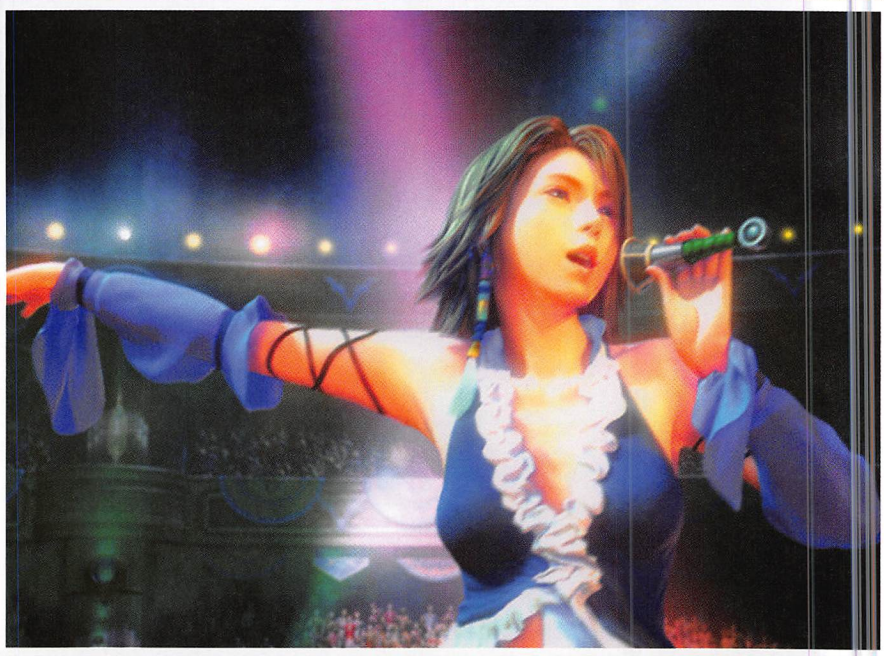


ps2 game of the show

The first direct Final Fantasy sequel is simply stunning in design and execution

Final Fantasy X-2

• **developer:** squaresoft • **publisher:** square-enix • **available:** fall



Final Fantasy X-2 has been strapped with uncertain scrutiny every since the first screenshots indicated the possibility of a dramatic tonal shift in the indomitable series' approach to its design. Sometimes we balk at change, but a little shakeup when there have been 11 Final Fantasy adventures prior seems the inevitable outcome.

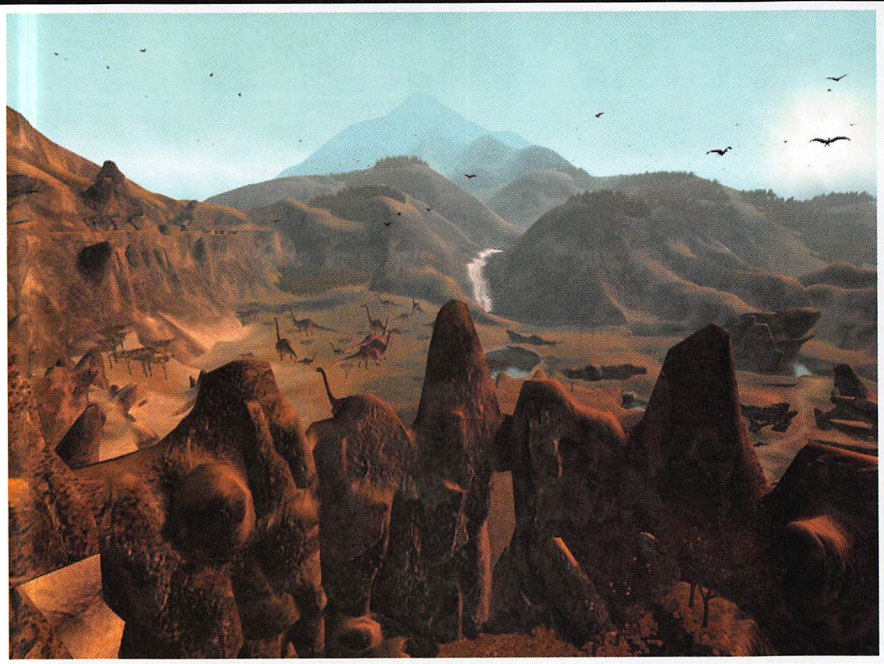
As the first direct sequel in the series, Final Fantasy X-2 takes place two years after the events of Final Fantasy X, and Spira is once again the setting. Here we see a changed place of raucous energy, showcased as former Summoner Yuna sings her pop-lungs out in a dance number of massive CG technical artistry. Once again, Square commands your attention with visual sophistication and distinct design strokes, but never have you seen anything this far removed from the more straight-edged fantasy before it. It's all extreme stylistic fun—there's even a little sexual innuendo going on. The all-female cast of heroes aren't big on covering up their flesh, either, which is a fluffy sexiness that carries into the dialogue. The battles, returning to the ATB system, feel swift and magnificently conceived in their visual punch, and a new job system lets you switch abilities and outfits on the fly.

Who knows where it's all going, but how can you deny the intentions of any Final Fantasy? There may have been safer PS2 games at E3, but none left the same mark.

Square has outdone themselves with X-2's character designs, if that's possible.

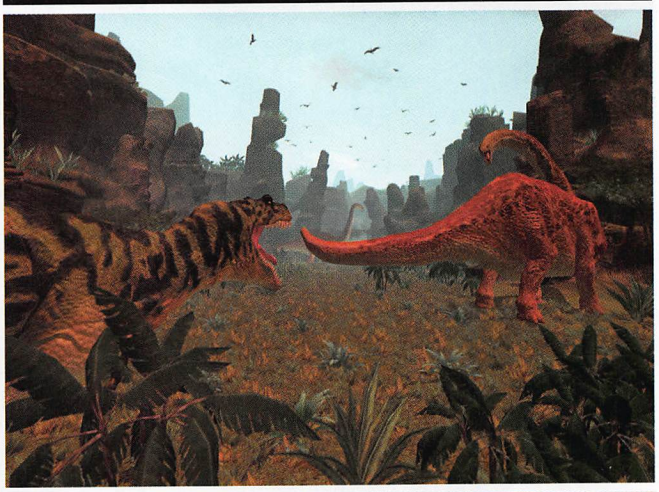
xbox game of the show

Prehistoric man created the wheel. Now Intrepid is reinventing it...with prehistoric man



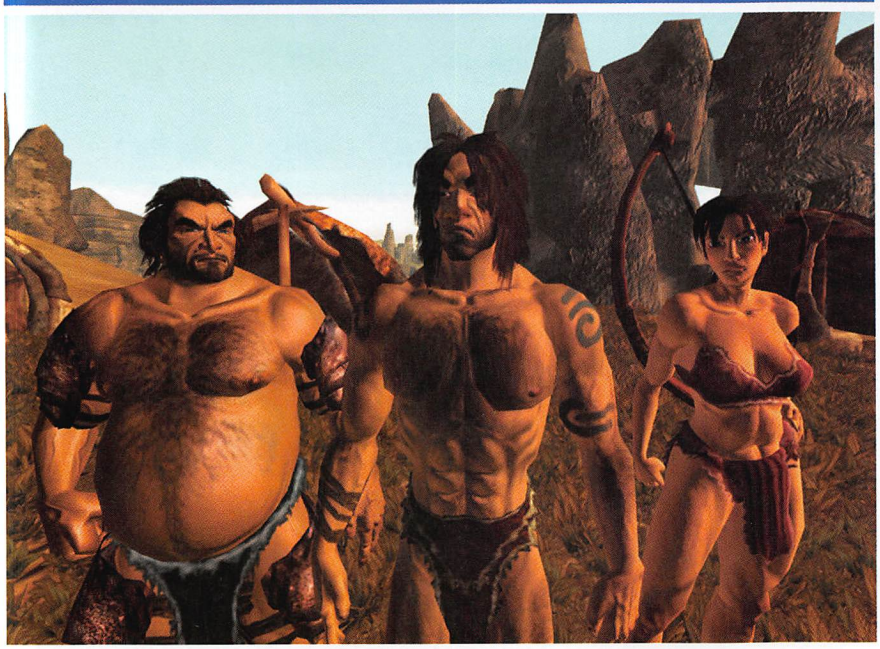
B.C.

• **developer:** intrepid • **publisher:** microsoft • **available:** 2004



After you kill it, the tribe will show up to lug the meat back to camp. They may even make you a nice bone necklace

Shown within a private screening room amidst the gleaming green confines of the Xbox Nation at E3, the guys from Intrepid seemed to be as amazed by what they've achieved thus far as I was watching it, mouth agape, going, "Oh my God, who are you people?" Who has the time and brain power to make algae form in a small lake or to evolve its fish over time? And then the female huntress of the tribe dives in and the camera shifts below, looking up through the water as she skims the surface. Every molecule of the environment seems programmed; it's just insane. Tribal prehistoric living told through brutal and beautiful action/adventure utilizing every scrap of realism you can possibly imagine, BC is the most ambitious game I have ever seen. The game presents a vast brutal reality that is so real in terms of geographical conditions and evolution that it really defies term "game" at all. In BC, you hunt, breed, migrate, nurture and provide, leading your tribe through the nascent earth's deadly environments, from ancient rainforests to underwater settings, through scathing desert heat to raging tropical rainstorms and fierce mountain blizzards. At one point I witnessed the strategic ambush and eventual killing of a Tyrannosaurus that looked so authentic I could almost smell the meat. After becoming bloodier with each strike, minutes after it fell, the tribe slowly began to emerge to carry the meat back to the settlement before rival tribes smelled the kill. I imagine these guys living in their office; the whole game is similarly free form. Had they left the dinosaur alone, it may have snuck into their settlement and eaten some of the young, which may have tipped the scales in some other direction...and so on. Sounds like a strategy game? No, uh-uh, it's pure action and adventure, blending combat, platforming, exploration and simulated prehistoric life. BC is a glimpse of what I thought games might become five years from now, yet it's less than a year away.

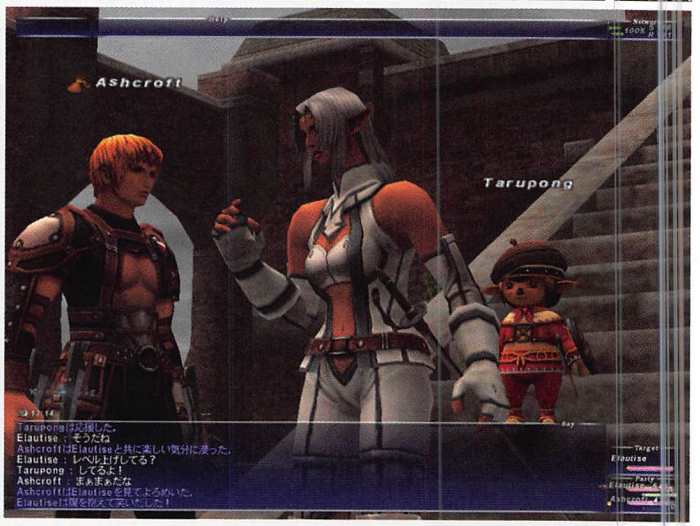


online game of the show

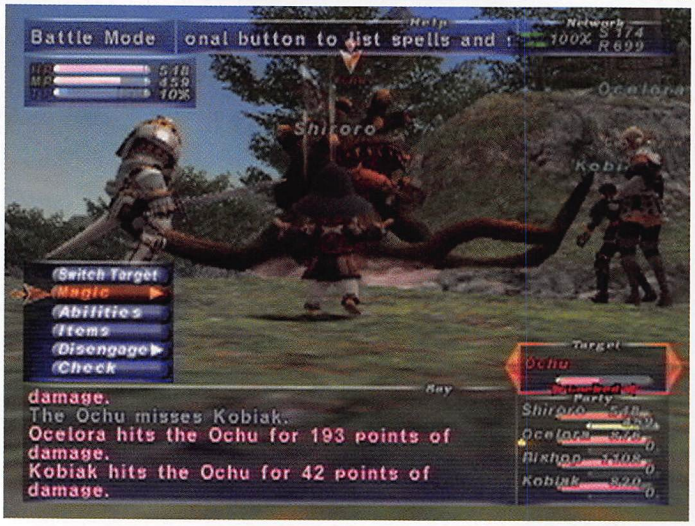
Reasons to play online beyond american rpgs and frag-fests are finally begininng to show

Final Fantasy XI Online

• **system:** ps2 • **developer:** square • **publisher:** square enix • **available:** 2004



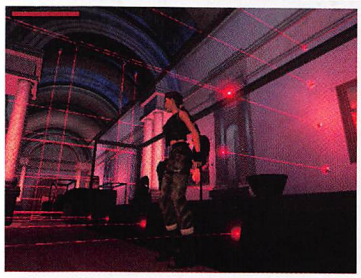
That Ochu missed Kobiak... but Kobiak hit the Ochu for 42 points of damage! The humanity!

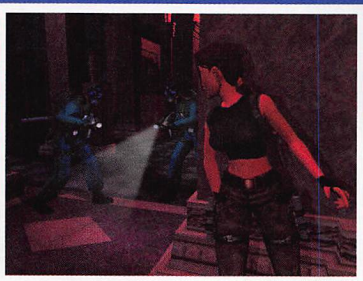


If our addiction to Phantasy Star Online is any indication, then the forthcoming Final Fantasy XI Online should be an absolute life ender. Though playing a game like this on a show floor for minutes at a time cannot give a true indication of its potential to sap hundreds and hundreds of hours from your life, what we saw had us dying to play more. From the vast worlds and deep character evolution to the typically high caliber Square presentation, FFXI Online promises a great deal. And unlike Everquest, this game actually has some style. Due for release in 2004, expect to see it bundled with the internal 40Gb hard drive, which along with the Network Adapter, is required to play. Pricing details for the HD and the game service itself have yet to be announced.

biggest disappointment

lara continues to struggle with her ps2 debut. will core pull it together in time?





Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness

• **system:** ps2 • **developer:** core • **publisher:** eidos • **available:** summer

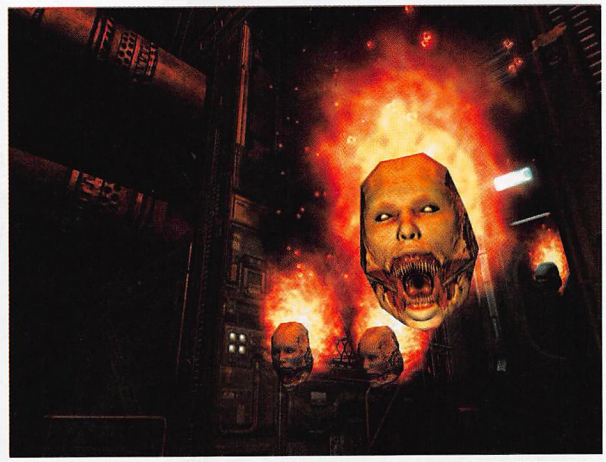
It's been two years since the last time we played the new Tomb Raider; the first time being back when Herdy Gerdy was in early development. Now we know why Eidos has kept her under wraps. Something has gone terribly awry, and Lara moves like she's underwater; otherwise the game looks like...Tomb Raider. Ladies and gentleman, Lara may finally be leaving the building. I hope we're wrong; this is one franchise we'd hate to see fade away. Our first date with Lara is one none of us will ever forget.

pc game of the show

Surprised?

Doom III

• **system**: pc • **developer**: id • **publisher**: activision • **available**: 2004

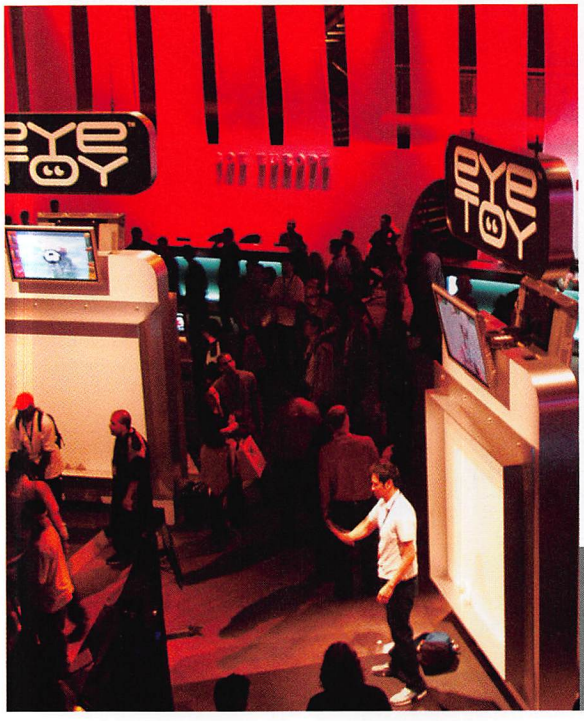


Yes, it's still not playable a year later, but to look at Doom III was enough to find it more interesting than any of the myriad first-person shooters at the show. Listening to original Doom creator John Carmach speak of his intentions and where the game is going makes you want the game even more. And then watching the footage of awesome monsters and scenes of incredible intensity hit without mercy is enough to brand it most-wanted. Just take a look at the volumetric lighting—everything has eerie presence thanks to real-time shadow casting unlike anything you've ever seen.

best peripheral

Sony takes out a lease on your personal space

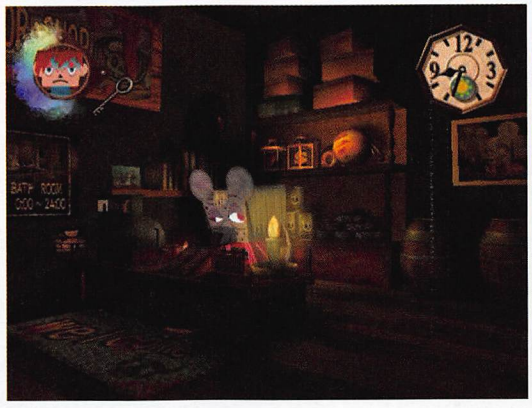
Sony's Eye Toy



This is what all those ridiculous contraptions like the U-Force and the Activator have been leading toward all these years: the Eye Toy, a USB digital camera for PlayStation 2 that actually places you into the game and lets you control the action by moving your body. The Eye Toy will bundled with 12 simple but kick-ass mini-games, and you'll be able to take it home for a mere $40. Soon we'll be pulling down virtual wndows with our hands just like those dudes in Minority Report and The Matrix Reloaded.

quirky coolest

The cutest game that might scare you to death



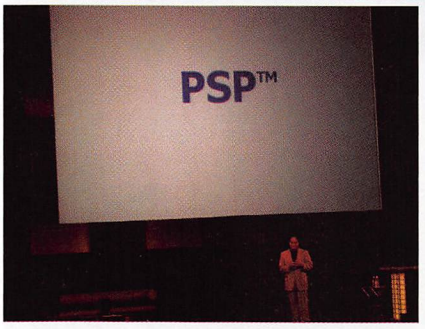
Gregory Horror Show

• **system**: ps2 • **developer**: capcom • **publisher**: capcom • **available**: 2004

...Today on Dr. Phil: kids unsuspectingly traumetized by the Gregory Horror Show... Capcom's creepy 4D puzzle/action game may look like something from PBS Kids on the surface, but upon further inspection, it's about a kid trapped in a hotel purgatory, peeping and stalking its inhabitants for their spirits, so death will set him free; anyone seen Carol-Anne? What goes on inside would make Rob Zombie sleep with lights on.

biggest surprise

Nintendo must be quaking in their boots...



Sony PSP

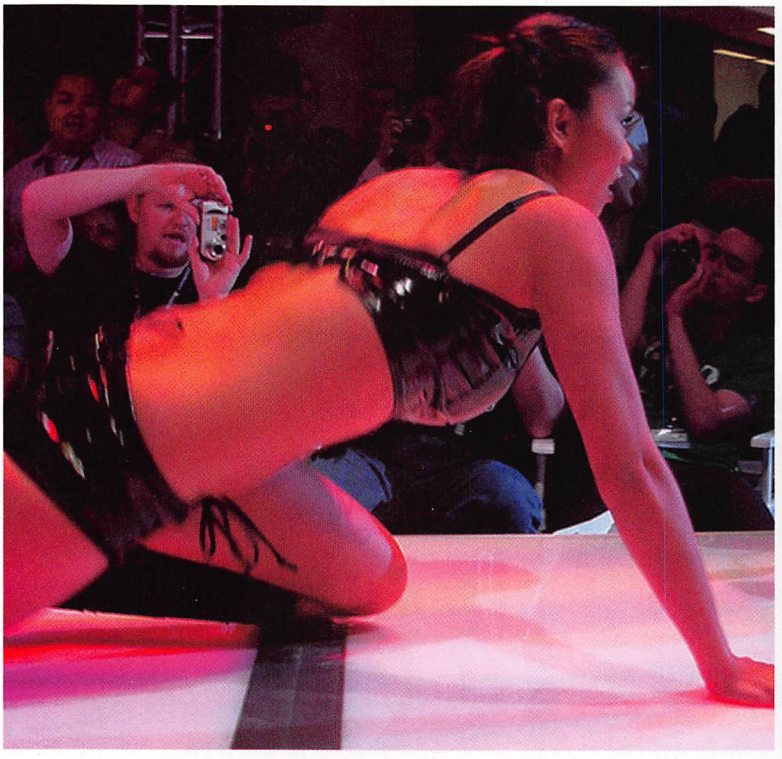
Rumors have been circulating for awhile about a possible Sony handheld system. The PSP is a stunning piece of kit, featuring a 4.5" TFT widescreen LCD and uses 1.8 GB dual layer Universal Media Discs. The little system can handle polygons and NURBS, and will also feature USB 2.0, Memory Stick, and GPS connectivity. No launch date or price was announced, but expect it in early 2004.

best third party

True to their roots—and you

Capcom

Capcom simply will not compromise their legacy to conform to the whims of the market. Rather, they continue to build on what's made them one of the most successful and respected publishers in the business; customer loyalty, great brands and a few risks (with square heads) here and there.

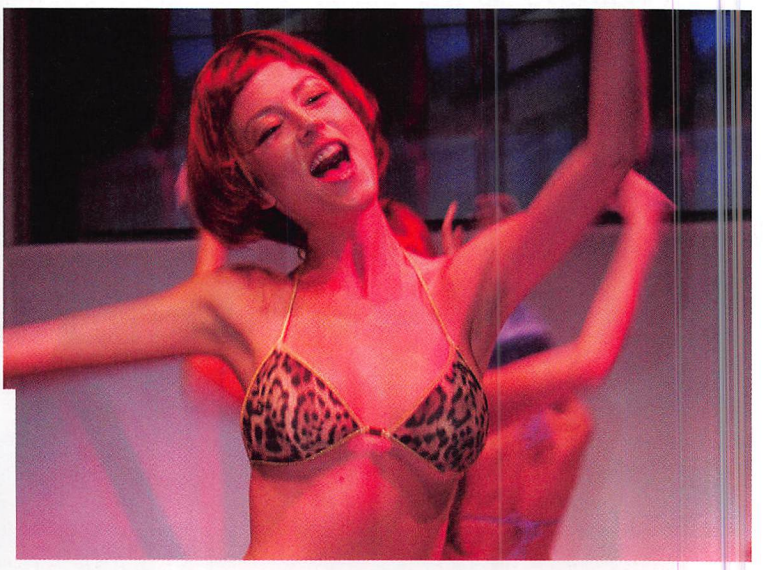


best reason for isle clogging

Tecmo jammed the west hall entrance all 3 days, but we forgive them

Dead or Alive honeys

They parked us so close to these girls to witness the debauchery, we could smell the, er, makeup. As beautiful as they were, however, nothing comes close to the DoA girls' virtual beauty on screen. Too bad the Japanese can't design women in real life. Still, Tecmo pulled out all the stops and stopped up E3 all three days.



goriest game

If you thought AI was Gore, you ain't seen nuthin' yet!

Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

• **system**: ps2, gc, xbox • **developer**: 3do • **publisher**: 3do **available**: fall

The best move 3DO ever made was deciding to bet the farm on this game. If you're going to use designs from Simon Bisley and Stan Winston and broach subject matter this Biblical, you'd better be ready to spill some blood, and they are: buckets of it. More importantly, the blood isn't used as a crutch or a gimmick. First and foremost, Four Horsemen is going to be a solid game and with any luck will may even get Trip's mind off of Army Men forever.

gba highlights

Plenty to keep your SP fat and happy for another year

Boktai GBA game of the show

• **developer**: KCEJ • **publisher**: konami • **available**: fall

It's either genius or the most whack concept of all time, as Kojima dares to force gamers outside to amass enough energy to beat bosses after dragging them out into actual sunlight. On the surface, Boktai is a wonderful old-school isometric Castlevania-ish adventure; its heart, however, beats to a different drum—one that can only be fully explained by reading our August issue.

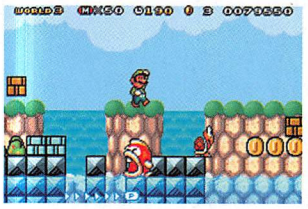
Metroid: Zero Mission

• **developer**: nintendo• **publisher**: nintendo • **available**: tba

Nintendo's keeping quiet about Samus' latest, but from all appearances, Metroid: Zero Mission is a thorough remake of the original NES Metroid. Relive the awesome adventure that started it all, updated with fantastic graphics and modern play mechanics like hanging from ledges and the wall-spring jump. It was only shown on video at E3, but we're anxiously awaiting more.

Super Mario Advance 4: Super Mario Bros. 3

• **developer**: nintendo • **publisher**: nintendo • **available**: september



Yes, it's another Mario remake, but this time it's a remake of Super Mario Bros. 3—arguably Mario's greatest adventure ever. From raccoon suits to Koopa kids, all the brilliant gameplay of the classic platformer is faithfully recreated, complete with visuals straight from the SNES All-Stars version. SMA4 is even e-reader compatible, allowing players to unlock new levels and features.

Sword of Mana

• **developer**: squaresoft• **publisher**: nintendo• **available**: late 2003

So you've been craving a sequel to Secret of Mana for years, but Legend of Mana didn't float your boat? Then Sword of Mana should be just the thing. This action-RPG's gameplay is highly reminiscent of Secret, right down to the Ring Command system, while the beautiful visuals draw inspiration from the PSX title. Best of all? Two player co-op link-up mode.

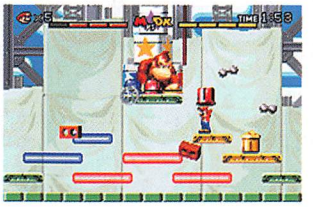
Mario and Luigi

• **developer**: nintendo • **publisher**: nintendo • **available**: late 2003

We've seen Mario in RPGs before. And we've experienced Mario's mix of role-playing, platforming, and timing-based battles before. The twist? In Mario And Luigi, Luigi's (obviously) in on the action, and you control each brother's actions simultaneously and independently with the A and B buttons. Naturally, there will be plenty of Mario characters to interact with and the Mushroom Kingdom to save.

Mario and Donkey Kong

• **developer**: nintendo • **publisher**: nintendo • **available**: tba



Mario And Donkey Kong is a throwback to the original DK, and I mean that in a very positive way. Just like in that classic, the goal here is for Mario to get through each simple stage and catch the big ape, but deceptively tricky obstacles block the path in puzzle-like fashion. Hopefully this won't disappear like the DK game Nintendo showed at last year's E3.

Fire Emblem

• **developer**: nintendo • **publisher**: nintendo • **available**: late 2003

At long last, the highly respected but never localized strategy series is making its North American debut later this year. This installment of Fire Emblem tells the story of Lin, a young woman who is fighting to take her rightful place as ruler of her country. At her disposal are a variety of fighters, knights, wizards and more, each with their own special skills to help pave the road to victory.

Mega Man Zero 2

• **developer**: capcom • **publisher**: capcom • **available**: september

Zero continues his struggle to save the Reploids in the sequel to last year's excellent (if extremely challenging) Mega Man Zero. Zero will now be able to change into new forms with new abilities, while a skill-based enhancement system will award new powers to talented players. Alternately, you can battle head-to-head in link-mode play.

Final Fantasy Tactics Advance

• **developer**: squaresoft • **publisher**: nintendo • **available**: september

The long-awaited sequel to one of the most revered strategic RPGs ever is getting constantly closer to its U.S. release. While the story is completely original and a new "law system" keeps things on the up-and-up, the classic gameplay and complex job system of the PlayStation original are intact. Between the dozens of jobs and hundreds of missions, FFTA is the definition of depth.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

• **developer**: konami • **publisher**: konami • **available**: october

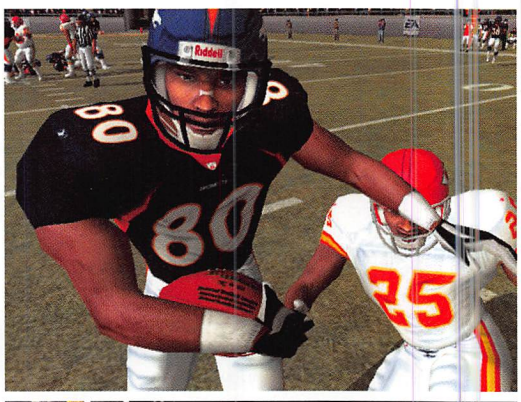
While the console versions of TMNT are all-out melee brawlers, the turtles' GBA offering puts a bit more variety into the mix. The emphasis is still on the fighting, but there are pits to jump and obstacles to avoid, and some stages even offer hang gliding or faux 3D shooting. And of course, there are TMNT mainstays like Casey Jones and Splinter to encounter.

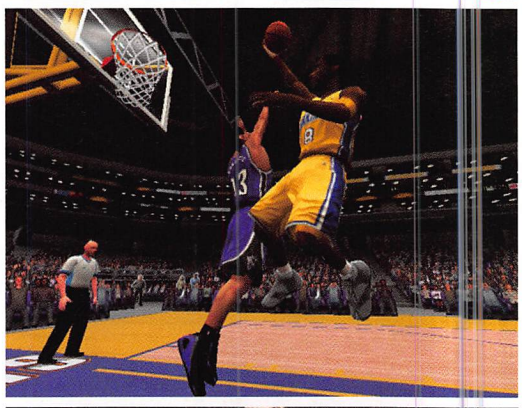
sports

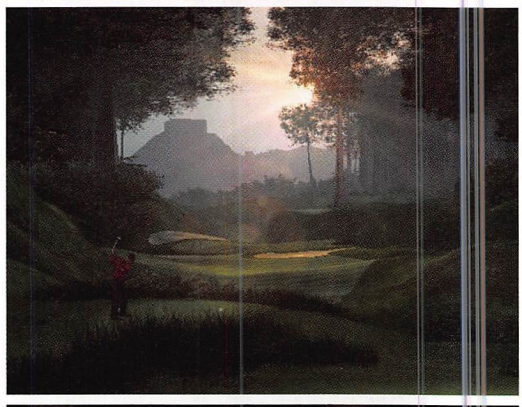
Sports gaming is reaching the point where it deserves a show of its own, in the meantime...here's what shizzled our nizzle

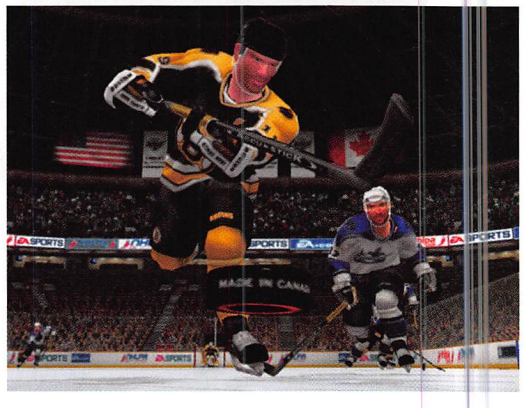
words tom ham

Sports was in full effect at E3 this year and the name of the game was online. Every major player in the industry had something wickedly cool to offer sports gamers and what's great for you is that it's not going to cost a dime. More than mere roster updates and matchmaking services, these new features simply blew me away. Imagine checking out your stats in real time, anywhere in the world? Or what about saying the word "Hike" in your headset and the ball is snapped (and it's not who you think). These are just a small glimpse of what you will be able to do with sports games this year. Are you ready to play?









EA Sports

EA Sports announced a compelling new feature for all of their sports games this year. Called the EA Sports Bio, it will actually reward players for playing their games. Spanning across all of the EA Sports 2004 titles, your entire game data (seasons, profiles, etc.) will be read from a single file. So instead of having numerous saves for each individual game, you'll have one all-encompassing data block. This is where it gets interesting. Imagine you just finished a good chunk of the modes in Madden NFL 2004. You complete Training Camp, you beat all the teams and finally, you take your Franchise Team to the Super Bowl and win. OK, now switch to NBA Live 2004. You plop it in and it immediately the game recognizes the fact your Franchise Team has won the Super Bowl. Players will now get a message that would say something like, "Since you went to the Super Bowl in Madden NFL 2004, you've now unlocked classic uniforms for all players." If you were to put in Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004, it might give you a bonus club or a new course. No one knows exactly what sort of bonuses and rewards players will get for each game, but bringing this added level of value to their sports games is pretty damn cool.

EA Sports' big announcement at E3 was their exclusive commitment to the PlayStation 2 for online gameplay. Sorry Xbox owners, no Xbox Live support for any EA Sports titles. So if you want to play Madden NFL 2004 or NBA Live 2004 online, you'll have to do it on the PlayStation 2. Why the exclusivity? "There were a multitude of factors that led us to the decision for this year," explains Erik Whiteford, director of EA Sports brand, "but chief among them was maintaining a direct relationship with our customers—and not requiring them to pay an additional fee to another company to play EA Sports games online."

For their 2004 lineup, the EA Sports Online mantra was "competition anytime, anywhere," and with that they're hoping to have the largest online sports gaming community around. This year, every EA Sports game is going to have online gameplay. So that means Madden NFL 2004, NBA Live 2004, NASCAR Thunder 2004, NHL 2004, Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004, FIFA Soccer 2004, NCAA Football 2004, NCAA March Madness 2004 and MVP Baseball 2004. Yes, it does feel good to be king.

EA Sports Online has also streamlined the way players will log into games and find out their rankings as well. Instead of having multiple logins for each game you own, players will now have a single, universal login that will work across all EA Sports Online titles. Just pop in the game, click on login and you're ready to play.

In addition, EA Sports Online introduced their new rankings system. Here players will be able to see their rankings in multiple leaderboard categories against other players with similar skill sets. So you think you got game in NBA Live? Go online and check out how you stack up. Find the better player and then go challenge him to a game. Stats and rankings will be updated on a continual basis. And if you want to see how many players are playing on EA Sports Online, just get online and go to www.easports.com and see.

2004 will also see the start of EA Sports Tournaments online. Here players will compete in laddered competitions for all sports (except NASCAR and NCAA Football). And for top players, EA Sports is planning on holding exclusive tournaments with bling bling prizes. Details will come out later on this summer.

A big complaint of current EA Sports games is how difficult it is to find compatible players and play with them. For 2004, EA Sports Online has made matchmaking more intuitive and efficient by incorporating new technologies and features. Now after you login with your universal login, you can join lobbies that fit your skill level and find players that you can actually play with and not have to worry about getting your butt kicked.

Rounding out the key features of EA Sports Online is EA Sports Talk and EA Messenger. EA Sports Talk allows players to chat over IP—so let the trash talking begin! Not only can you chat in the game, players will be able to chat in lobbies as well. EA Messenger gives the player the ability to Instant Message their buddies no matter which EA Sports game they're playing; so if you wanted to play FIFA with a buddy of yours and he's playing Madden, just IM him and tell him where to meet you. Pretty slick.

EA Sports Online is promising a lot of cool stuff this coming year and we have no doubt they'll be able to pull it off. EA Sports didn't become EA Sports by doing things half ass, we can't wait to see how this all plays out. "Every year brings new challenges," says Whiteford, "some anticipated, others not. Continuing to raise the bar in sports gaming by offering online gameplay across the entire lineup, creating interesting new initiatives like EA Sports Bio that reward players for playing our games, and working on other EA Sports initiatives that we'll announce further down the road are all fun challenges—as is creating great games for every single franchise. I think you'll really see a standard of excellence across our 2004 EA Sports lineup."

Microsoft Game Studios

At E3, Microsoft Game Studios announced the arrival of the XSN Sports network, a one-stop shop for sports players to find out stats, rankings, leaderboards, etc.—anywhere in the world and on any Web-enabled device. "XSN Sports is the breakthrough sports fans have been waiting for," explains John Rodman, Lead Product Manager for XSN Sports. "This is about bringing interactive sports to the digital lifestyle, where you can be linked to your game and your standings through your Xbox, Xbox Live, PC and cell phone. We're tearing apart yesterday's idea of sports games." And just to set the record straight, XSN is not an acronym (so it doesn't stand for Xbox Sports Network or anything like that). Continues Rodman, "XSN Sports is a name that represents the first network of Xbox games where sports fans face real competition."

XSN will be utilized with all of Microsoft's upcoming sports games, which includes NFL Fever 2004, NBA Inside Drive 2004, Top Spin, Amped 2, NHL Rivals 2004 and Links 2004. What exactly is XSN? XSN is actually a technology that will allow players to log in and be a part of their sports games like never before. So in addition to putting efforts into improving the online gaming experience of their sports games, Microsoft is giving the power to the player to create their own unique sports network. "XSNsports.com is the web-based service that links your Xbox, Xbox Live, PC and cell phone together so for the first time ever," continues Rodman. "You are connected to real people in real leagues with real rivalries."

XSN officially launches in August 2003 with the release of NFL Fever 2004. Once you've logged onto Xbox Live with Fever, XSN will commence keeping track of everything you do in the game. Your wins, losses, how many yards passing, how many yards rushing—no stat has been left out. Players then will be able to log onto www.xsnsports.com and check out their stats and see how they rank with folks around the world. What's incredible about XSN is that it will update stats, scores, schedules and rankings every 15 minutes. So even while you're at the office, you can log in and see if anyone has broken your winning streak.

In addition, players can set up their own tournaments, organize leagues and create schedules. You can also invite players to compete with you too. And since every Xbox Live player is automatically registered at the XSNsports.com website, players can scout out any player they want. Is someone creeping up the ranks to take your top position? Go online and check out his stats and see what his weapons are so you're better prepared when he challenges you. All this is possible with XSN.

Probably the coolest feature of XSN is how players can find out information about their sports games. Not only can they log in with any web browser or your Xbox, down the road you will be able to check your stats on your PDA or cell phone. Microsoft is hoping to add email and pager alerts for pending tournament games you have to play.

And how does Microsoft feel about EA Sports going to PS2? "We didn't see that as big news, "says Rodman. "Microsoft is still in talks with EA to bring their games online to Xbox Live. Until then, gamers will be able to play XSN Sports on Xbox. We prefer to look at the opportunities. XSN Sports, we believe, will excite sports gamers all over the world, as well as bring in sports fans that are new to gaming. Whether you love football, basketball, hockey or other major sports, XSN Sports will change the way you think about how games can be played on the console."

Top Spin Tennis was absolutely our favorite new sports game from Microsoft, and is only one of many that will be playable online via the XSN Sports network

989 Games

Not to be outdone by the competition this year is 989 Sports. Although their games may not match the visual quality that EA Sports has, their games are definitely showing signs of improvement. All of their sports games this year have extreme promise and both NFL GameDay 2004 and NBA Shootout 2004 are looking exceptional.

With the success SCEA has had with their network adaptor, it's only natural that 989 Sports came up with their own sports presence online. "989 Sports Online will offer gamers the deepest online sports gaming experience ever produced for a next generation console," explains Troy Mack, Product Marketing Manager for 989 Sports. "With the development of a central online lobby, accessible via either the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system or the gamer's personal computer, all 989 Sports fans can now interact with each other through a PlayStation 2 controller, keyboard, or headset (VOIP)."

To login in to 989 Sports Online, players will only need to create one username and password, which will work for all of 989 Sports games. Players can login, hang out and chat with other 989 Sports players. "Additionally, once a gamer accesses a specific game lobby (i.e. NFL GameDay™ 2004), players have numerous options," continues Mack, "some of these features include a large number of ranked statistics, the ability to create tournaments, roster updates, polls and surveys. Each 989 Sports game will have all these options, and users will be able to track their overall 989 Sports online success across the entire library of titles."

Another key feature to 989 Sports Online is the real sports ticker at the bottom of your screen. What's cool is that this isn't some made-up ticker or scores of other players on the 989 Sports network; it's the real deal. So whatever game you're in, you'll always know what's happening in the real world.

But 989 Sports had something else up their sleeve this year. Something so revolutionary, it's going to change the way people play sports games forever. What are we talking about? Voice recognition. Utilizing the brilliant codec that was used in SCEA's popular SOCOM US Navy Seals, the folks at 989 Sports decided to implement that into the gameplay. So when you want to hike the ball, all you have to say is "Hike." If you want to call a time out, just say "Time out." We saw a demo of this at E3 and it blew us away. The voice command technology was first used in SOCOM U.S Navy Seals," continues Mack. "The 989 Sports development team wanted to incorporate something in their games that would allow SOCOM owners to use the headset for other games. 989 Sports development teams constantly brainstorm to come up with innovative new features and additions for upcoming games, and the idea to use Voice Recognition in 989 Sports games was a concept that came up in one of those sessions." What's cool about the voice technology is that 989 wants players to use only their voice instead of the controller. So instead of pausing the game to watch the instant replay, you'll just have to say "Replay" and the game will go through the motions automatically. Other commands such as play calling, audibles, and formations will be included in the commands. 989 Sports is planning on hundreds of possible commands for the game's final release.

And it doesn't stop with football; 989 Sports is also planning on implementing voice recognition in their other sports games too. "As of now, NFL GameDay™ 2004, NCAA® GameBreaker® 2004, and NBA ShootOut 2004 will support the voice command technology," concludes Mack.

interview

Shigeru Miyamoto
Nintendo Company, Limited

games shown at E3
The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords, Tetra's Trackers, Pikmin 2

"I worry that if the game industry focuses too much on [war games], it could end up driving people away from playing games. I really think it's more important to look at other ideas."

interview dave halverson & brady fiechter

play: I'm curious, on the brands that bear your name, are you involved from the outset? Or are you in the picture after the development begins? For instance, on Wario World, I'm curious how much involvement you had with the game? It has those trademark Treasure traits, but it also has Sunshine kind of levels to it.
Miyamoto: Well, I'm not really the person to talk to so much about Wario World. The reason being is that the Mario Land games and the Wario games are actually done by a different team than mine, which usually does the Mario games, like Mario Sunshine and games like that. The internal team that supervised Treasure with Wario World is actually a separate team from my team, and is a different development group that was originally headed up by a good friend of mine, Mr. Yokoi, way back when. My team, which is known as EAD, and the team that worked on Wario World, which is known more commonly as R&D1, are both internal teams, and we both have that Nintendo style of gamemaking and gameplay philosophy. So I don't really have to look over the games at all, because I know they'll do a good job on them. We have a lot of the same tricks of the trade, so to speak.

Touching on Metroid a bit: it was extremely successful as a first-person shooter. Initially there was a lot of talk that you had entered the picture after it had already been decided it would be a first-person shooter. Was that the intention from the beginning, or did they have to make the best of it after Retro already got started?
Actually, I had been involved on the Metroid project from the very beginning. And we had talked about doing Metroid as a first-person game. A lot of people said, "You can't do Metroid as a first-person game." But we went ahead with the first-person portion of the experiments, and because of this idea that Metroid has to be third person, we added the ball mode, where it pulls back and you do get the element of the game where you get to see Samus in third person.

So the obvious question: will the sequel be third-person, or will it continue down the same road?
That's a very good question. I think it probably will be a first-person game, but I'm also interested in a third-person Metroid experience as well.

We love the new Picasso Link... We did a little survey, and overwhelmingly, it's like ten to one, our readers prefer the new Link over the serious, more human link. Will you be continuing with the newer Link?
Those are some incredible results in your survey! Was it reversed before the game came out? [laughs]

Well, you know, we were all definitely wondering. But when you see the expression and the way it comes through with the character, that's when it really gets you.
Well, obviously the Ocarina Link, as I like to call him, is not gone forever. We've seen him in Smash Bros., and now in Soul Calibur. But to create a complete and cohesive Zelda world in that style would take so much time and energy that it's difficult for me to even think about. So I think we'll continue to use these different art styles and different directions we're going. I don't think it will change too much. The idea was to look for the kind of Link that was best suited to a 3D world, and I think now we've found that.

On the collaboration with Kojima-san and Silicon Knights. What is the protocol, how is it divided?
It's actually very clearly defined. The game design and the expression in the game is all Mr. Kojima's direction. The animation, the programming, the tools and whatnot are all Silicon Knights. Nintendo plays kind of the role as facilitator between the two, watching and making sure everything is going well with the two of them, consulting with them on ideas. Kojima has sent some of his staff from Tokyo to Canada; we've sent some of our staff from Kyoto to Canada to work with Silicon Knights and provide support. We actually have video conference calls as well very regularly.

So will we feel Nintendo in Metal Gear? Will we feel your presence?
No, it's really going to be a Kojima-directed project. We will provide the technical support and know-how when we can, but it will definitely have the flavor of a Kojima game. And of course we'll be supporting them with connectivity features as well.

On Production Studio 4, Capcom's GameCube studio. What is your opinion on where they're going with their game development?
Shinji Mikami is a very unique and creative game designer, so we cooperate with him if he needs us to. But he's mostly doing those games on his own. The nice thing about that is he definitely has his own unique flavor to his games. They have a very distinct style, something that is different from what Nintendo produces. I think it does a good job of balancing our lineup and bringing a new flavor to the GameCube.

So you're impressed with what they are doing?
Don't pee your pants... [laughs]

We love P.N. 03. It's actually our next cover.
That game is very interesting. The visuals and the tempo of it.

When the industry trends change, Nintendo doesn't conform. They innovate, and you are usually the innovator. I was really surprised when I heard about The Sims. 'Cause I thought you were going to come and say, maybe, another Kid Icarus, and take another legendary brand and shock the world. Do we still have something like that to look forward to? Is Nintendo going to start shying away from the platform game?
Ah, at last, Kid Icarus finally appears in an interview this year at E3 [laughs].

I won't bring up Yoshi just yet.
Well, obviously with us releasing Super Mario Bros. 3 on the Game Boy Advance, we've taken essentially all the great platform games that we made and re-released those. So we've run out of the next one to re-release. So obviously I think you'll find some innovation in that realm coming in the future. But also, I think maybe the trend of the platform game may be dwindling somewhat from what we've seen in past years. But the thing about platform games that are so nice is that they are very simple gameplay styles, they are very easy to pick up and play. And so because of that I would like to continue to innovate with platformers while still maintaining that simplicity of design and simplicity of control and accessibility for everyone.

Nintendo made a comment that there were certain boundaries the company would not cross. What is your opinion on violence in games, especially all the war games that have been popping up.
It does seem to be a bit of a trend in the United States, and those types of war games certainly aren't selling in Japan these days. I do wonder a lot why people like them so much. To a certain extent I worry that if the game industry focuses too much on that, it could end up driving people away from playing games. And at the same time, I feel if they focus too much on the shock value of violence, eventually people will get tired of it and stop playing games. I really think it's certainly more important to look at other ideas.

You've talked about keeping the art style simplistic in a game like Zelda. We're getting to a point where it's

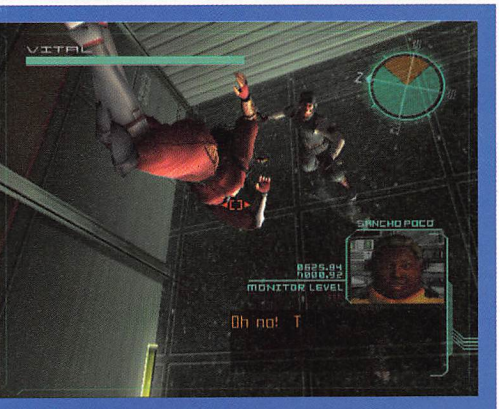
interview

producer/director Atsushi Horigami & lead progammer/co-director Shinji Morimitsu
Konami Computer Entertainment Japan

game shown at E3
Cy Girls

"I do want to add the sexual element into the game, but the problem in Japan is they are very strict..."

interview dave halverson & brady fiechter



taking so much work to place all the art and textures within these growing universes. How is this complexity going to affect the next round of consoles? Will games start getting shorter? How will they get around this?
Well, really that's a question for game designers. Obviously game players are demanding grander and grander experiences, and as the technology allows you to create more grand experiences, obviously we've used the technology as a crutch, giving the gamers what they want and trying to continue to surprise them with these greater visuals. But really I think we've reached an age where, with the next generation of platforms, the greater technology isn't really going to allow us to do that much more than we're doing in the current generation of hardware. So at that point it becomes a question of game designers to think about how they're planning to use that technology to continue to give players new experiences that will continue to keep them entertained.

You've been in this industry for, what, 26 years? What continues to drive you, how do you maintain the passion?
First off, I work with a lot of young people. [laughs] I kind of feed off their young attitudes. Obviously, coming up with new ideas, particularly connectivity and all these new potential systems in the gameplay. And that's a lot of fun for me to think up of new ideas like that and how to use those new systems. Of course, creating new games is a lot of fun, and taking those games and showing them to people, and seeing how people react to what you've created, really helps keep you going.

play: Are you going for equal parts action and stealth?
There's been kind of a misunderstanding in the press the past year, especially in America—this is not a stealth game. It's focused on action. Ice is kind of in your face, aggressive—she gets in there.

So you've got a game that stars two beautiful women. Does that mean we might see an element of sexuality in the game? Will there be an M rating or are they going for the Teen?
The rating is still pending right now, but we believe it will probably go Mature.

That would be wonderful!
[laughs] Well, it's not necessarily for the sexiness. I do want to add that sexual element into the game, but the problem in Japan is they are very strict about putting that kind of element in a game you sell. They don't have the ESRB like we do, but we basically are not allowed to make such a game unless we go all the way. Even Vice City; it's only allowed on PC in Japan.

So they're actual beings are outside the system?
When they do jack in, their real bodies are...they fall asleep outside the entry point.

It's so smooth. Looks very nice.
In Japan, it's a standard that the game has to be running 60 frames per second. There's obviously a limit to how much graphics you can squeeze in, and you have to balance between detail and framerate. These are real polygons, and it all comes off very beautifully.

Wow. There is definitely tons of action going on. You make it look effortless.
And you can see there is kind of a stealth element, but it's really only one thing: when she's hugged up against a wall, she can come out and start shooting, and then go back around. She just locks in beside the wall. Here's another cool move: depending on what weapons you are holding, it will affect the motion of the character. That beautiful cartwheel she's doing, that's not available with all the weapons.

The original Takara toy line featured Cutey Honey as one of the characters. Not really the anime *Cutey Honey* as much as an American version. Will she perhaps appear in a sequel?
Ah, Cutey Honey. We had talked about originally including Cutey Honey, but there was a bit of a problem with the licensing. It's possible for a sequel.

So, do the two characters share parallel stories?
They are parallel stories, but from a completely different perspective. There's an excellent dualism theme playing throughout. But you select one character and play her all the way through.

Looks like the focus was to keep the game playing really fast.
Yeah, and just wait till you see some of her killer moves. It's all timing. And you'll see some of the stylistic presentation, how the game slows down when executing certain moves, you're going to see a lot more of that in the final.

So Ice would not share this dojo level?
Right. Some stages are exclusive, and some are the same, but it's from a completely different perspective.

So it's almost like playing two separate games.
You nailed it right on the head. Duality. Parallel worlds. That's the whole idea. Some will be shared, but there are different mission objectives and perspectives.

The camera seems nicely honed. Are you controlling it? I know it's sometimes tough to get it down in an action game like this.
You can select what you want. There's basically an advanced and beginner. So the second is a free camera, you have more control. I want to really be aware of the world market. In Japan, they like to have the camera set up for you already. Obviously, American users prefer the freedom and ability to customize. In Japan, using the right analog stick is just impossible. We're not used to it.

I wish Sega would give you the Shinobi license.
[laughs] Unfortunately I can't comment—but you can tell by my reaction I'm thrilled to hear you say that!
Just to let you know about the costumes: when you go through the game, you'll get different costumes in different levels. Like Ice: it'll depend on her circumstance. She might have to change into, say, a diving outfit. And I will let you in on a cool feature here: there's a bathing suit for Ice. And the characters really show their different personalities. Ice is not afraid to be in your face, show off a little bit. Aska is a bit more shy and feminine, she holds back a bit, is more serious.

I like the way she slinks along the walls.
I'm sure you guys have seen some wall-walk games. But the games with this feature, you are either going straight up and flipping over or are walking in a straight line. You have control here. It's not like you're fully walking on the ground, but there is a good amount of control. And it's not automatic. I think it's the first time it's been done like this.

interview

Hideo Kojima
Konami Computer Entertainment Japan

games shown at E3
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater, Metal Gear Solid: Twin Snakes, Boktai

"You will be experiencing two different kinds of battles: the hide and seek in the jungle and the hide and seek in the buildings"

interview chris hoffman & michael hobbs
on-site translator scott dolph

Subject 1
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater

• **system:** ps2 • **developer:** kcej • **publisher:** komami • **available:** spring 2004

play: What does the subtitle of Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater, mean?
Hideo Kojima: I guess it's a nickname for the Delta Force and the Green Berets. And the theme of the game is the jungle and you have to survive by finding food. You'll be eating snakes literally, and yourself are a Snake. And then you saw it says "the birth of reptiles" in the trailer. There may be a couple of hidden meanings in the name too, but we can't yet reveal them.

The trailer seemed to emphasize a lot of action. Will the stealth elements still be a major part of the game?
First of all, two-thirds of the game will consist of the mission in the jungle or the forest like you saw in the trailer. The rest of the game takes place in artificial environments like buildings. And there will be hiding in the jungle as well. If an enemy sees you, of course you will have to fight. You will be experiencing two different kinds of battles: the hide and seek in the jungle and the hide and seek in the buildings. Since one of the new themes is the jungle, we wanted to show you the battles in the jungle and the stealth in the jungle. That's what we've done in the trailer. Also, the guards in the buildings and the soldiers in the jungle will behave differently. In the buildings, it will be a lot like MGS2 and enemies will sweep and clear areas like they did in that game. In the jungle, they will be stalking or tracking. You will see the different sets of AIs that behave very differently.

Can you tell us how this fits into the Metal Gear continuity? I noticed it said 1961, 1962, et cetera in the trailer.
As you can see in the video, it goes back in time. This is the first time I've said clearly it's in the past. It takes place during the Cold War era, when spies were really spies and when espionage was the big thing.

So does that mean you're playing as a different Solid Snake? Maybe Big Boss?
That I'll have to leave to your imagination. It could be Snake in a way. He could be different, but he's not different.

What effect did the response to MGS2 have on the creation of Metal Gear Solid 3?
I guess the biggest thing is that Raiden is not appearing in MGS3! Actually, Raiden is quite popular in Japan, so I'd like to bring him back in some game, but not this one. Also, while the gameplay of MGS1 was loved by everyone, in addition, everyone really liked the story. So I tried to make the story more complicated in MGS2, but some people didn't like it. So we're going back to the beginning in MGS3. In MGS1, when Snake infiltrates the base, I guess a few people betray him. But in MGS2, everyone betrays everyone. In MGS3, we're not going to make the human relationship as complicated.

Do you anticipate continuing the story of the Sons of Liberty, Revolver Ocelot, etc?
Yes, probably. We know people are curious about what happened after Sons of Liberty. So we'll try to go back and leave some clues in MGS3 about what happens in the future. But what we really wanted to create is a game based in the jungle so that the player can experience field combat.

How did setting the game in the jungle allow you to

change the gameplay experience?
What you've played so far up until Metal Gear 2 all took place in buildings, artificial locations, where everything is at a 90 degree angle. You have walls, ceilings and floors: flat surfaces. But in the jungle, you don't get any of that. You might have little mounds that you have to climb up, there might be cliffs, or there might be huge bumps that you cannot see beyond. You might have to climb up a tree and up to the branches to reach other areas. This changes the gameplay totally.

MGS3 is not a first person shooter, nor does the camera follow directly behind the player. The thing is that you always start on the bottom of the screen, the south, and you go up, north. But you cannot take a direct path. There are many PC games which are set in the jungle, but they have paths. In MGS3, in our jungle, there are no set paths so you can go in any direction, there are no set routes. And there are many games where you might fall from a high place and it's game over or you lose a lot of life. But in MGS3 you might break your leg, and you can drag it along or treat it properly. These are the kinds of things you need to do in the jungle to survive, and all that is in the game.

That must have been an incredible challenge to develop...
Yes. In MGS 1&2, you always start out near the entrance to the enemy base. In real life, you never have the opportunity to land right near the enemy base. The enemy will spot you. You would probably parachute down maybe a few hundred miles from the enemy base and that's where you start your infiltration. Let's say you want to infiltrate a base in country A, well, you never land in country A, you start out in country B, near the ocean, desert, or jungle. This is the most fun part of infiltrating. You'll trek through the jungle, you might get bit by a poisonous snake, you might be weakened by the cold, but then you finally make it to the base. And since you have to feed yourself, you can hunt and capture snakes or other animals and eat them. Or if you don't want to do that you can steal food from an enemy base. But this is a Metal Gear so the main objective is to accomplish a sneaking mission.

Subject 2
Boktai

• **system:** gba • **developer:** kcej • **publisher:** komami • **available:** september

First, the obvious: what inspired you to make this game?
Well, handheld systems are a great invention, but the games that you can play on them are basically the same as those on home systems. I thought this was unfortunate. There has to be a better way to exploit a portable system. Being able to carry it around means that your environment can change as you move around. I wanted this changing environment to be reflected in a game. Let's say you're in car and you're going 50 km/h, and then maybe 60 km/h, I wanted the speed of the car to be implemented in the game. This is how I was thinking, and I had this vague idea of incorporating the environment into a game somehow.

With game creation, you are basically making something out of nothing. It's just digital data. Since we have total control of everything that's in the game, we set the rails, and the players follow these rails. I wanted to introduce something that we had no control over to change this convention and add a lot of depth, and that turned out to be sunlight. I am a fan of vampire films. You know, I always want to drag the vampires out and burn them under the sun, so this idea and the previous idea of using the changing environment merged together.

So I had this concept for Boktai, but the thing was the solar sensor. I didn't know how much it would cost and if it would be practical to include this in a ROM. Then, a year and a half ago, I found out that it was possible and that it was not that expensive. So it wasn't the case of the technology being there and wondering, 'What can I do with this?' The idea came first.

How much fun is the game without using the sunlight feature?
(Laughs) It's very fun without the sun. If I took out that feature, it would still be great game to play. But once you experience playing it in the sun, and then not, there is a huge difference. If you play it on a cloudy day or a rainy day or at night, which you can do because you can stock up on solar energy for a while, you'll start thinking about the sun all the time, wondering, 'Is it gonna be sunny tommorow, when can I play outside.' You'll be thinking about Bokai even when you're not playing the game and you begin scheduling your life around it.

Subject 3
Metal Gear Solid: Twin Snakes

Since this is basically a remake of Metal Gear Solid 1 from PlayStation, what was the nature of the collaboration with Mr. Miyamoto?

Miyamoto approached Konami headquarters about a year and a half ago and asked if we could please create a Metal Gear game for GameCube. Why would I turn it down? It's Mr. Miyamoto, the man I respect and I would like to work with him. I've never had the chance to make a game for the GameCube, so they made this offer and I said sure and came up with a game plan of basically redoing MGS1 using the storyline and the characters, and the mechanics of the system of MGS2. Unfortunately, we couldn't create it ourselves because we have no experience of making a GameCube game, so we began looking for a team within the Konami group and we didn't find one. And then we started looking throughout Japan, and even though there are many teams, we couldn't find one that would maintain the Metal Gear quality. So we went to Mr. Miyamoto at Nintendo in Kyoto and asked him if he could help us and he recommended Silicon Knights. He said here's a great team and they have the technology.

I've seen their game Eternal Darkness, so I knew that they were technologically capable so that wasn't the question. I wanted to know whether or not we shared the same soul. So when Denis Dyack, president of Silicon Knights, and his core staff came to Japan we had a meal and we talked. My belief is that games are not simple toys, they should teach us things because they will eventually become a culture, and this mentality of mine was shared by Denis and his team, and I knew that we could work together.

Then I asked my great friend and film director Yuhei Kitamura, who is probably the closest thing in Japan to Hollywood, to work on the polygon demo. Normally, I never have someone have total control over anything in the game, but I made an exception because it was Yuhei Kitamura. I said please do as you wish, the polygon demos are all yours.

• **system:** gamecube • **developer:** kcej • **publisher:** komami • **available:** winter

interview

director Koji "IGA" Igarashi and composer Michiru Yamane
Konami Computer Entertainment Tokyo

game shown at E3
Casltevania: Lament of Innocence

"The thing about this game is that it will be all at night. Things that will be lit up by moonlight. This will be one of the graphic themes that will be running throughout. "

interview dave halverson & brady fiechter

play: Well, we have to start with mentioning how much we loved Symphony of the Night. The music we consider some of the greatest ever.
Koji "IGA" Igarashi: Now, second best.

OK, now that's a great quote! All the Castlevanias—Castlevania IV, Bloodlines, Symphony—they've all been such elegant 2D experiences. How are you translating that elegance into the polygonal world?
Well, first of all it's going to be a smooth, beautiful 3D world that will run at 60 frames per second. That's something that will happen. The thing about this game is that it will be all at night. Things that will be lit up by moonlight. This will be one of the graphic themes that will be running throughout.

So you're happy with bringing the art of Castlevania to 3D? You're happy with the technology?
Well, we always want more power. When it comes to a creative situation, we certainly want more, but with what we're doing, it is certainly compelling enough to do. But we always, always want more!

Castlevania was originally arcade and early 8- and 16-bit console, rooted in platforming. When it made the switch to PlayStation, it became more like Metroid, with a lot of exploration. How is the progression in this game?
In Symphony of the Night, you saw experience points. That's not here. However, what I've maintained is that exploration element. Initially you have five different areas you can go to. There is a main boss for each of those five areas. So, it will be up to the player to explore those areas and find the bosses, defeating them in any order. You could explore one area and move on to another without having to immediately defeat a boss.

So you don't necessarily have to acquire certain skills to penetrate a certain area?
The five areas are available to you at any time... In the old Castlevanias, it was more of a linear progression. If it was just all action, good players would be able to get to the boss right away and beat them easily, and other players would not. With Symphony of the Night, that's why there was an experience points system. But with an experience system, whether you want to level up or not, you're going to get those experience points and become stronger. However, in this game, there will be a lot of items scattered across the maps. Of course, enemies have those items as well. So the more exploration you do, the more rooms you find with items, the stronger you will be and the bosses will be easier to beat. But also, a really good player may make the beeline directly to that boss and try to beat them.

Will jumping and using the whip for swinging play an important part?
There's gonna be places where it will be required, but it won't be too difficult.

But it won't be automatic, right? You still have to do timing?
Yes, but the key here is that where it is absolutely required, it won't be too hard. There are places, like banisters and such on a higher level, where there might be safe spots, and getting there [requires more skill]. And this brings the question, "Why do you need a safe spot?"

Medusa heads, that's why.
[laughs] No, but in the past, you could hit the select or start and bring up an item screen, which is basically a pause. But here since you are using the items in real time, in the midst of battle, stopping could be problematic.

So are there Medusa heads?
[laughs] No, no Medusa heads!

Good. They drive me crazy!
It seems like everyone hates them.

I want to touch on the music. Castlevania is as much as a state of mind as it is a gameplay experience. The composing of the music, the orchestrating of the rolls, do you both work together?
It's a little bit case by case. There are times when they may provide the initial artwork of what a stage may look like, and [Michiru] will study the imagery and find inspiration from that.

Will the story be integrated within the game, maybe real-time, or will they go with CG?
It will be real-time rendering.

Can you talk a bit about how you prepare to create your music, what kind of steps you might take to get into form?
Michiru Yamane: It all starts with the image illustrations. I take a look at that. Sometimes she'll have samples of the game to draw from as well. And I have to communicate with the designers to ensure their image of what should be happening is shared with mine. After that, it's all concentration, sitting down on the piano and just start pounding away.

So back to the state of mind thing. Castlevania has always had great atmosphere, the moments that pull you in when you want to pause and soak it all in.
Yeah, just take a look at that stained glass! It's so cool! [laughs]

I know the RPG elements have been removed—no more experience points—is there much emphasis on collecting items, spells, things of that nature?
We're using a similar system to that of Harmony of Dissonance, where there are spell books. What you get instead are mystical orbs once you defeat the bosses. Combinations of those with subweapons create different effects.

What's your favorite Castlevania?
Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse.

Time to dust off the NES. So does this game flip upside down when you beat it?
[laughs] No, no.

Seriously, speaking of Symphony of the Night, will the game be just as long?
That's what we're aiming for.

You guys are almost done, right?
Well, close. Pretty soon we're going to start dragging out the dead bodies. [laughs]
[At this point IGA-san enthusiastically reveals loads of concept art on the game. When I ask about an intriguing demon-type creature, he laughs and exclaims, "No, no. You must wait for the game!"]

So this isn't the end of Castlevania, right?
It is my destiny to continue to make Castlevania...

interview

game shown at E3
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

director Yuji Kojima (l) & producer Yasushi Kawasaki (r)
Konami Computer Entertainment Studios

"We want to make sure that the world is kept intact so they can go into that world very easily. They can become a turtle"

interview dave halversonn & brady fiechter

play: In the Unites States, we were promised a darker Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles with the new Fox series. One closer to the comic. Does the new game mimic the old, pizza-eating, "cowabunga" turtles, or is it more the new, darker, comic-book turtles?
Kawasaki: It's not quite as dark as the comic books were. Since it is a property based off the new cartoon series, it's emulating that.

Got it. The old SNES and Genesis games were hugely successful for their hardcore arcade-style gameplay. But game design has evolved so much since. My question is: how are they injecting new blood into the classic arcade feel to bring it up to the next-generation standards?
We think of it more like, since it's gone 3-D it's a new game. A new atmosphere. The 2-D was a side-scroller, so you didn't really become a part of the action. But with the new 3-D environments, it's easier to become part of that.

So you're interacting with the environments more? You're going to use walls and pieces of the environment?
Not so much as that, as the fact that they can see the cartoon on TV then become a part of the cartoon while playing the game.

Ah, I see. 'Cause I noticed in the game that it seems like there might be some air juggles. Are there things of that nature?
Yes.

What about the cutscenes? Is there integrated story? Are there cinemas in the game?
Yes, there are in-game cinemas as well.

Are they real time or are they cel animated?
Cel animated.

Oh, really? So will it have more of an anime feel on that side of the scale, or would it mimic the United States animation?
We wanted to make sure that it tied in with the cartoon series. The style itself is going to be retained, even though it's new material.

Are there any platforming elements in the game?
It's not what you'd call platforming elements. It's more of an action game. Within the action elements you'll have the jumping attacks and whatnot.

I know at the press conference, they talked about the control scheme being kept simplistic. Of course back when the Turtles first originated, controllers were so much simpler. Was that what they wanted to do from the start? Really maintain that pure action feel, very simplistic and straightforward?
We wanted to keep the simple controls. The reason for that is that we want people to be able to pick up and play it and still be able to execute a lot of cool moves. As they go further into the game, they can try different things out, and then other things will happen. However, we didn't want to penalize the inexperienced player as opposed to the experienced player for trying something new.

We see a lot of that, and that's good because the better you are, the better you can play the game. That makes a lot of sense. How about on the re-playability scale? Is it going to be easy, medium, difficult? And are there going to be any kind of rewards to prompt players to go back through the game many times?
We don't have varying difficulties. But each character will have different qualities.

So when you beat it with all four, will you get anything? A new shell?
If you don't play as all the turtles, then you won't get all the bosses.

Nice. In the new series, there's two new vehicles. The bike and the new, big, crazy truck. Any vehicles?
We wanted to keep it pure action, so vehicles will not be making an appearance.

I noticed that the 3-D camera was (and I love this), in front of the characters. So you weren't looking at their shells. You were looking at their fronts. Is that the way the whole game is orchestrated?
It changes, and depends on how you want to use the camera in each stage. We wanted to make sure that it kept a cartoon look and feel so that when you're a little bit farther out, you can see all over, but on some stages, it's a different camera for more ease of play.

Does it zoom in and out or does it stay fixed? Can you zoom it with a button?
No. Especially because of the two-player cooperative mode.

What is the team size?
About 40 people.

It's been how long in development?
About a year.

Wow, so they've done a lot in a year. Is it a traditional six levels?
Six levels, but around 35 different areas.

Wow. Awesome. So then the game has got some length to it?
Certainly.

Has Mirage given you free reign to make a great game? Any constraints?
We do have a lot of freedom to do what we want to do. We're always in constant contact with Mirage.

I presume it's being predominantly designed for the American market. Will it also be released on the Japanese market?
They'd certainly like to release in Japan, but the Turtles don't really have a following. So we're going to wait and see. We'd like to, but we don't know.

When designing a game that focuses on the American audience, does that dramatically change your approach to the way that you create the game?
We don't worry about that too much because we've already seen Japanese games become quite successful in the U.S. If we think it's fun, then hopefully everyone will think it's fun.

viewpoint

Femme fatales, a killer Squirrel, a voodoo doll, a vampire lord, the master chief, medieval warriors, and a guy named Joe

Dave Halverson / Editor in Chief

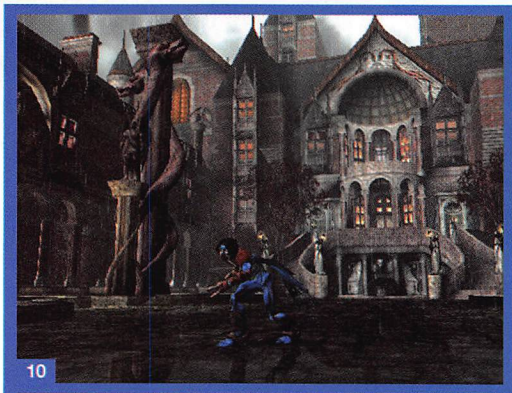
E3 2003 Personal Top Ten

10. Legacy of Kain: Defiance
9. Kindgom Under Fire: The Crusaders
8. Voodoo Vince
7. FF X-2
6. Conker Live and Uncut
5. Halo 2
4. Viewtiful Joe
3. B.C.
2. Sudeki
1. Beyond Good and Evil

The heart of the gaming industry now beating like a Shaolin monk rather than a chimp on ecstasy, with minions of developers shoehorned into their respective media giants like elves in Santa's workshop, E3 2003 was, simply put, business as usual. By sheer size, the industry is managing to fire on all cylinders, with nary a genre overlooked. First-person shooters now apparently grow on trees; platforming has emerged from its cocoon born anew; and elsewhere, old-school attitudes commingled with the new user-friendly side of gaming like chaperones at a Marilyn Manson concert. Nothing shocks us anymore; the lines have completely blurred. We're just another giant industry chugging along like the Love Boat.

An interesting notion before I get to the meat of E3 2003: GTA: Vice City has apparently become the bane of the industry, the fruit of the devil—demonic software incarnate! Both Nintendo and Konami made reference to the game at their press conferences, with Nintendo exclaiming "Mario won't be shooting hookers anytime soon" and Solid Snake slipping clever in-jokes into his third sortie. The sad thing is that if Mario did shoot hookers it would likely be his biggest game yet, and Nintendo knows it (but thankfully are too proud to act on it). How ironic is it that the industry itself is now scrutinizing its violence—gaming's best now struggling with the moral dilemma of whether to cast their integrity aside to feed the insatiable thirst for blood that is the U.S. gaming scene, or stay true to the wonder that delivered us to this glorious moment? The Japanese developers we spoke with (four Konami teams, Miyamoto and representatives from Capcom) don't even consider it an option. They are, however, curious when and how they lost so many users to a gratuitous slaughter-fest devoid of artistic prowess, wondering what went wrong in people's lives to remove them from sci-fi and fantasy and

"We're just another giant industry chugging along like the Love Boat."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Honorable Mention Castlevania Lament of Innocence, Tork, Billy Hatcher, Starcraft Ghost, and Sonic Heroes

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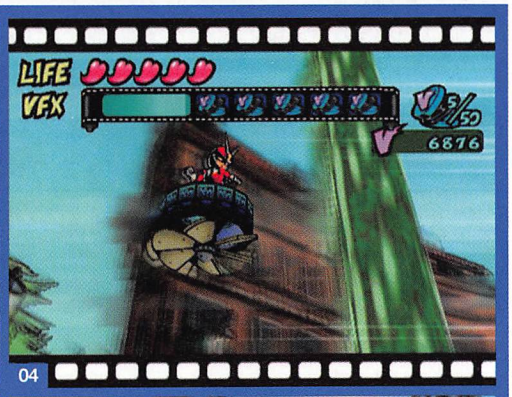

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deliver them to realistic death and destruction. Of course, it's Fox's fault, along with The Teletubbies. Regardless, whatever you hear about congress getting their panties in a bunch over violence in video games, they're losing the battle big time; in fact, they're likely the culprit responsible for all of the newfound gore. They've given it so much press they're selling consoles. Remember, we live in a country where humiliation and murder get top ratings on TV. Tell Americans where the blood is and they'll max out the credit card. Irony's a bitch, ain't it Mr. Lieberman?

I'm troubled by some of the trends that emerged at this year's E3, trends that if not for a handful of developers still true to the soul of gaming would have me stop right now and just enjoy my collection to date, rather than plunk down cash for blood. Trend number one: war. When did playing war become so desirable? I saw Medal of Honor as an homage to war, a franchise that, for those who could stomach it, would serve as a reminder of how brutal war is. But it has spawned a minefield of look-alikes; publishers are now scooping up famous battles like feature film rights and the bloodier and more death added the better. There were so many guys in full army gear at the show, I didn't know whether it was another game promotion or an occupation. When did realism become something we want to play on console? I thought the whole idea was to escape harsh reality. What's next, Rush-Hour Traffic, the video game? Next on my list of shite trends is the sudden need to script events, directing video games like films. The Halo 2 demo, for instance, as glorious as it was, shuffled the player through a scenario, being prodded like an actor through a complex action scene. Sure, scripting leads to a heightened sense of immersion but it also removes the human element from a game. I own plenty of scenes like this on DVD. I don't want to play the trigger for a chain of events pre-planned for my viewing pleasure. Besides aiming and pushing buttons, too little is left to the imagination, in my opinion. The new Lord of the Rings game had a similar make-up as did most of the "better" war games. Now, chances are these scenes represent only a fraction of the gameplay in their respective games; I'm judging strictly by what I saw. And finally, I'm willing to accept that gaming is being dumbed down considerably for the masses, and I'm all for it, as long as I have games like Viewtiful Joe, Voodoo Vince, Sudeki, BC, StarCraft Ghost, Legacy of Kain: Defiance, Castlevania Lol, Conker Live & Uncut, Maximo vs. Army of Zin (and on and on)... knock yourselves out. But one developer, when I asked him if there were any platforming elements in his game, told me "we use auto-jumping, because jumping leads to dying and dying isn't any fun." Okay folks, Miyamoto did it in Zelda; enough already—it's an action/RPG. What's next: a guy that comes over and plays the game for me? Can we nix the auto-jumping please? This has to be the single most bone-headed design trend since the cause-and-effect of Night Trap (which, come to think of it, is where all those war games are headed, strangely enough).

When all was said and done—the parties, the expensive dinners, the smelly taxis and the handing out of loose change to winos—the show floor folded up until next time. E3 was a wonderful celebration of a fantastic industry, but I do have a suggestion that might make next year's festivities run a bit smoother. Some games (most games) are clearly not meant for kiosk-style hands-on gameplay amidst the eardrum-splattering decibels of E3. Watching normal people struggle with Castlevania, P.N. 03, and other such games that require talent and a measure of training was beyond pathetic. I also think it works against them, since most of the people playing them come from retail. It's best to have someone from the team present the game or, better yet, play it for others to watch in these cases. Poor Vanessa was taking so much abuse I felt like killing the power.

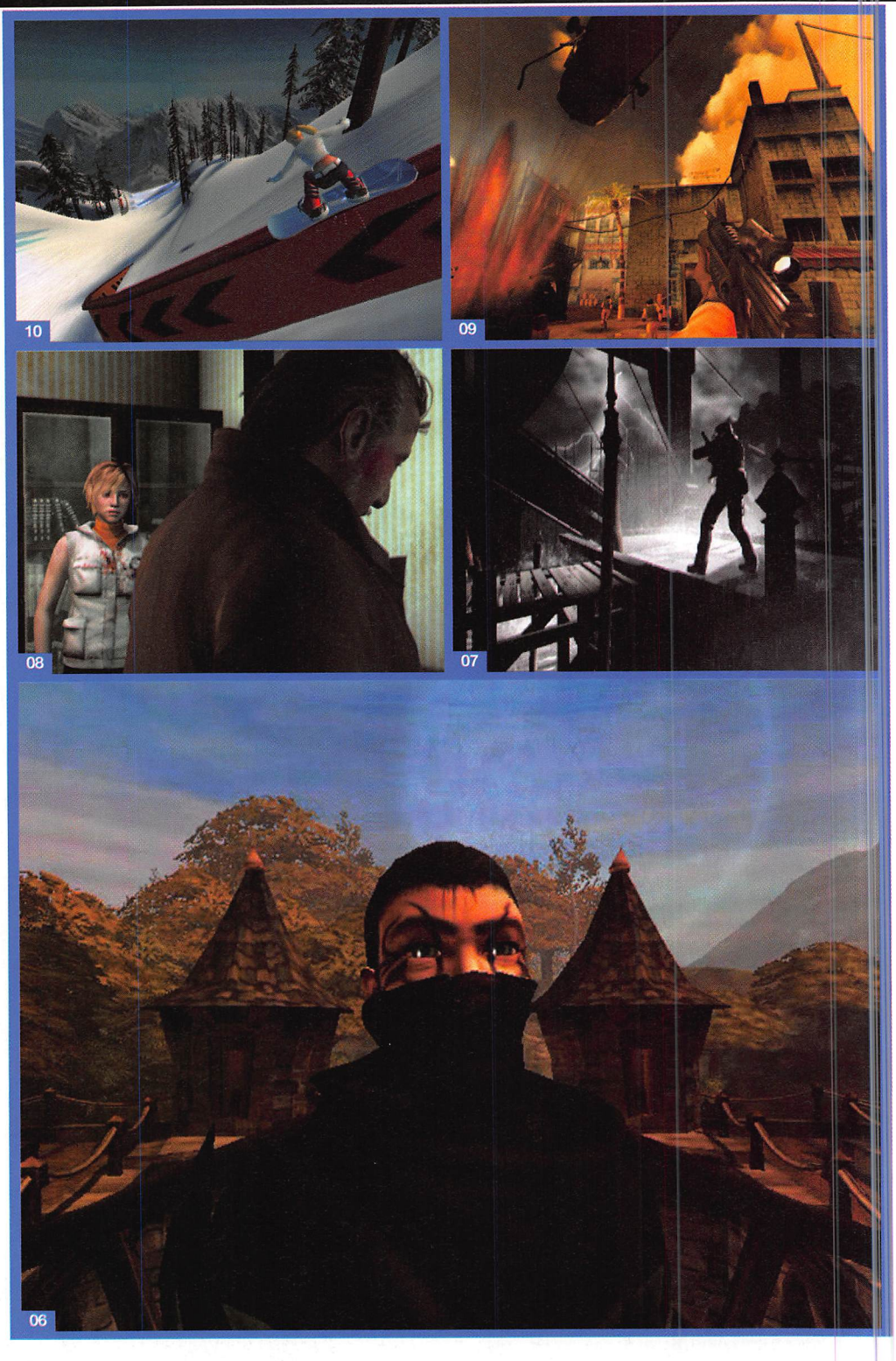
Until next time, whatever games you play, have fun, and remember: video games don't kill people, people that play video games kill people in video games.

Ten big reasons why I love video games so much. Have a look at that environment in Sudeki... or Conker looking for his next victim. All of these games represent future hours of joy.

viewpoint

Scripted events with lots of story, tons of explosive first-person shooters, not enough role-playing games, sequels for all

Brady Fiechter / Executive Editor



So let me understand you right. The idea is to race well enough that you impress the girl of your dreams, coerce her into a date, and watch her dance seductively in a bikini once you've landed the deal? Oh, but is there a zoom option like those cool volleyball games? And I'm still not clear on this war game. So you're dropped into the chaos of Pearl Harbor, experiencing—controlling—the path of destruction that leads to eerily convincing shootouts with Japanese soldiers? Do I get a sniper rifle like in that game where I get to pop Iraqis? And tell me more about how I can target specific limbs; perhaps there will be a sequel with real-time temple deformation? For clarity: why can't you get rid of the cops? Of course, that makes sense: bludgeoning prostitutes is one thing, but killing cops... No, no, I did see that game where you can rip bodies apart; I just confused it with the more realistic one that contained humans in a present-day reality. No, no, not the one with monsters, but with humans that look crazy real and curse a lot. Can't wait for PS3.

Good-bye innocence, hello primal fun. E3 2003 was a show of important questions as much as a delirious shot of excitement for the coming year of games—of great games, inspired games, emotionally charged games, visually stimulating games. With growth comes implications and complications, and to ignore them is to stunt the possibilities of true success. There is so much potential, so much good certainly on the way, and it's just that...well, things are changing. Right now, there's no way of properly defining what it all means, but to question is to advance the art of gamemaking.

Movie licenses are huge, sequels rule, but the most drastic shift in the approach to design has got to be the reliance on scripted events and storytelling to complete the interactive experience. Halo 2 was one of the most rousing examples in the way dense activity occurring all around you can ratchet the intensity up to extreme levels, but some complained that they feel like the game is playing them. This is a valid point, but from where I'm playing, I prefer the energy of massive events occurring all around me. Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King takes this concept to an apoplectic level, reaching even further into cinematic presentation than its predecessor; I absolutely love the level of immersion that's created. Is this the future? Is this what you desire?

What concerns me is the awkward way so many developers are attempting to harness this shift. When the action is framed awkwardly and with a crude understanding of

> "With growth comes implications and complications, and to ignore them is to stunt the possibilities of true success."

Check out all the sequels. Originality wasn't king this year, but that doesn't mean these games aren't amazing in so many other ways

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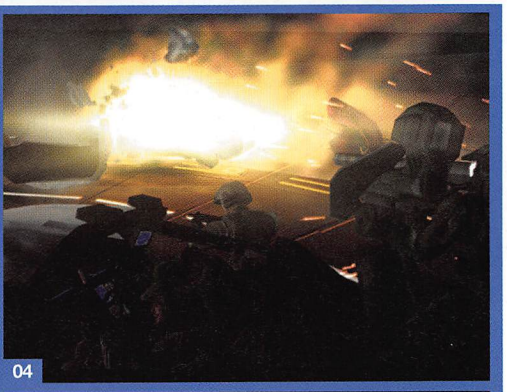
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film technique, the gameplay, no matter how compelling, is immediately sabotaged. If I have to see another game with horrible voice acting, crippled even more by hollow dialogue, it's back to playing the classics that relied on gameplay for their effect. I like where games are going, just not the growing pains needed to get there.

And I do love violence and destruction in my entertainment. I'm always up for sexy charm. P.N. 03 director Shinji Mikami has created one of the sexiest heroines yet, and his intentions are admirable: "I wanted to celebrate the female form." The holy grail is to present both with class and intelligence, with a passion for the inherent emotion involved and not merely the sake of obligation. Video games hold such amazing potential, and it's up to the true visionaries to unearth the treasures. Mean time, there are a hell of a lot of fun games on the way, and here are ten I can't wait to get my hands on:

E3 2003 Personal Top Ten

10. SSX3
They say seven to ten times the acreage of Tricky, with insane new tricks and gorgeous looks led by the art direction of film talent from Minority Report.

9. Shadow Ops
Despite my love for the Medal of Honor series and the impressive spinoffs, no FPS dealing with the reality of war was as impactive as Shadow Ops. Atari is sparing no expense, bringing in Hollywood talent to fill in the production. Even the Oscar-winning Black Hawk Down sound team is onboard.

8. Silent Hill 3
This one's taking its sweet time to birth, and what a gruesome, horrific monster it will certainly be. More of the same? Still don't know, because so much more has yet to be revealed.

7. Resident Evil 4
Like a lot of enticing titles, this one's video only, but E3 is about what I'm looking forward to and what sounds good on paper as much as what impresses with a five-minute spin behind the controls. Shinji Mikami seems fully aware that this series deserves fresh dedication, and he's confident "it will make you pee your pants."

6. Fable
There's no denying the raw artistry behind such Japanese stalwart RPGs as Final Fantasy—FF X-2 is stunning—but are they going anywhere new outside the realm of online? Fable redefines what we've come to expect from an RPG, weaving dramatic ideas within the classic construct.

5. Metal Gear Solid 3
I liked the idea of Solid 2, grew weary of its disarming pacing and thin dialogue. Kojima said he listened to complaints. He also crafted a stunning graphics engine.

4. Halo 2
Another sequel to a heavy-hitter. No surprise: it looks to pack twice the explosive power of the first, with the few-minute live demo showcasing wild scenes of destruction and ceaseless moments of scripted activity that grab you tighter from merely watching than most playable games on the floor.

3. Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando
Insomniac has taken a stupendous jump beyond the original with not just more of everything, but improvements on everything. The new experience-points system is a keen touch, and a more sophisticated lean ups the appeal. If pure fun is what matters, there was perhaps no better game at the show.

2. Beyond Good and Evil
The creator of Rayman shows why he is a French Miyamoto. Beautiful, imaginative, full of wonder and invention. Another reason why the adventure/platformer must live forever.

1. Doom 3
Yes, it's still on video, yes, the technology seems beyond practicality, yes, I want it more than any game sparking on the show floor. I love the genre, I love the series, and I have never seen a game with such visual force.

viewpoint

The classics return in spiffy new style, the Big N shows signs of wear, and Sony introduces the single coolest peripheral ever

Chris Hoffman / Contributing Writer

E3 2003 Personal Top Ten

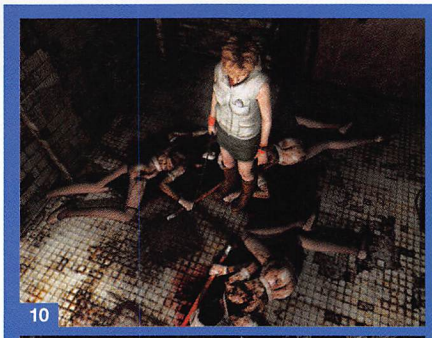
10.Silent Hill 3
9. Maximo vs. Army of Zin
8. Resident Evil: Outbreak
7. Viewtiful Joe
6. Metroid: Zero Mission
5. Conker: Live and Uncut
4. Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg
3. Final Fantasy X-2
2. Sonic Heroes
1. Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater

While violence, war and gore were big themes at this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo, my goal was to look past that (since my colleagues have eloquently described the situation already), to find some innovation and see the updates to my favorite series. I found both, often in the same place. While I admit there was no single standout game that really dominated the show for me, there was lots of stuff that promises to be either good or great.

Most of what I saw at this year's show was on an evolutionary path rather than a revolutionary one, and to me, that's just fine. I love the classics, and it's great to see them still around, only with twists to make the old formulas new again. I didn't really think that Sonic could go into uncharted territory, but by adding in a team dynamic, it's made the experience something completely fresh. I was fully expecting to be floored by Metal Gear Solid 3, but I didn't know it would be by going into the jungle, where no stealth action game has gone before. A remake of Conker, only with online thrown in? I'm there. While I've grown a bit tired of the Resident Evil formula, now that you can team up with (and eat the flesh of) your buddies online, it makes me want to play it all over again. And Metroid: Zero Mission...how cool is it to see the original Metroid apparently being remade with updated play mechanics, some 15 years after we first played it on the NES?

But speaking of Nintendo, the underwhelming nature of Nintendo's booth was a bit of a letdown. Sure, F-Zero and Mario Kart were fun, but without a big name along the lines of Mario, Zelda, Metroid or Donkey Kong on the 'Cube, it felt like half a lineup. Actually, I'm sure I'll enjoy both the GC version of Four Swords and Tetra's Trackers (I loved Four Swords on the GBA), as well as Pac-Man, but they're hardly going to rock my GC world. They seem more like something that should come free with my GBA-GC link cable than something I should pay for. At least the GameCube has Capcom (Viewtiful Joe) and Sega (Billy Hatcher) to keep things interesting.

On the other hand, over at Sony, I saw the one product that I do count as revolutionary: the Eye Toy. I hesitate to call it a game (it's more of a technology, which is why it's not on my top ten list), and I felt goofy as hell swinging my limbs around to smack ninjas out of the sky, but it was an absolute blast. What a great way to appeal to the gamer in everybody. Next year I hope to see things that are even more innovative, ones that really take gaming to places it's never been before.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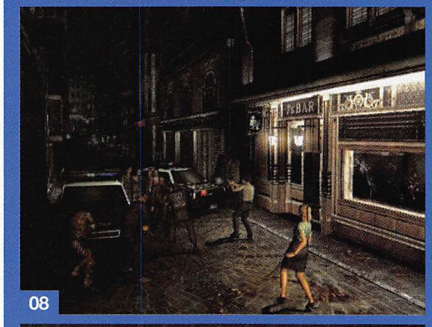
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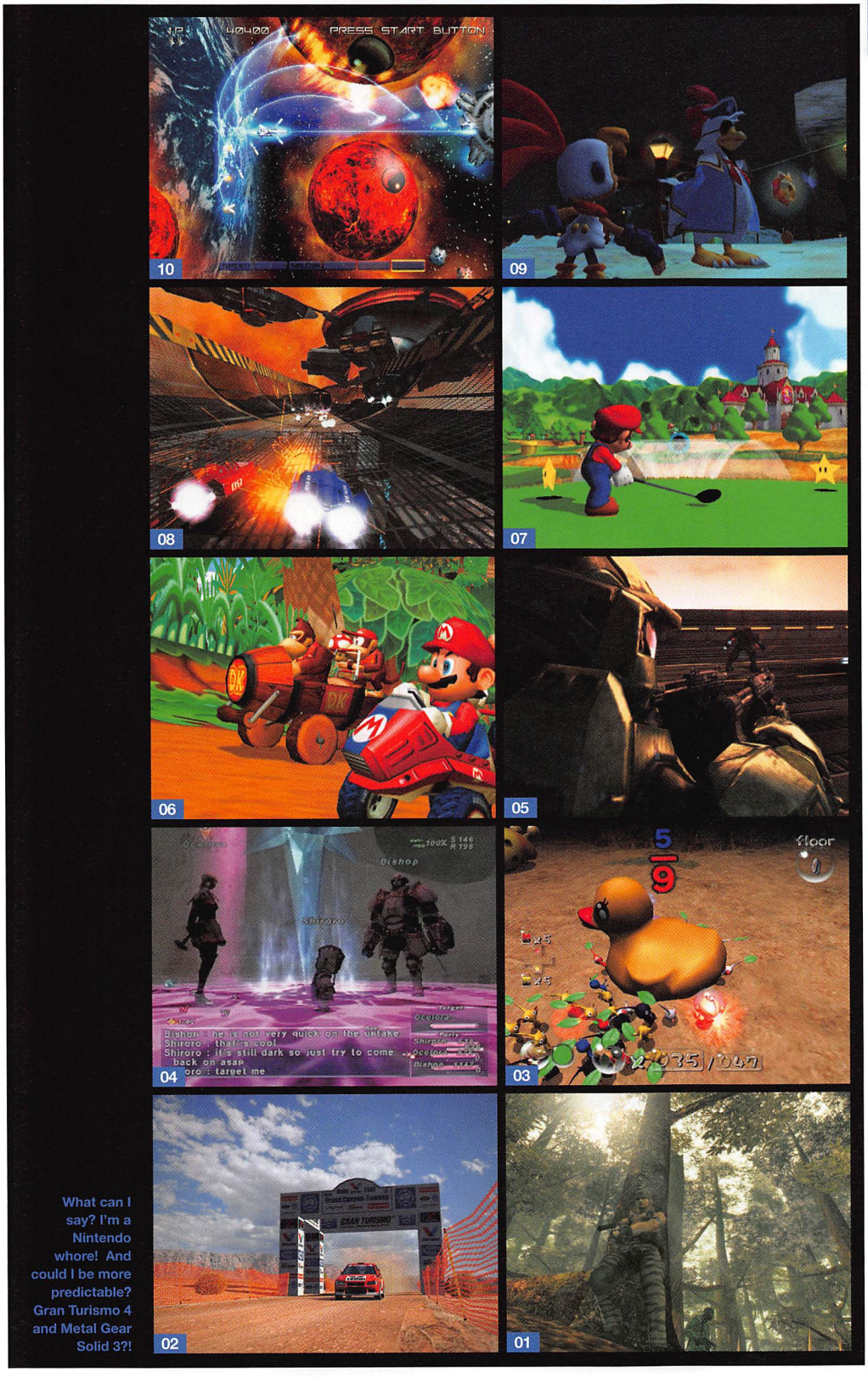
A lot of the games here are sequels, but they're sequels that promise to take the series to places they've never been with a double-shot of innovation.

viewpoint

It may be a tired subject, but isn't violence getting a little bit out hand?



What can I say? I'm a Nintendo whore! And could I be more predictable? Gran Turismo 4 and Metal Gear Solid 3?!

Michael Hobbs / Art Director

E3 2003 Personal Top Ten

10. Gradius V
9. Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg
8. F Zero GX
7. Mario Golf
6. Mario Kart Double Dash
5. Halo 2
4. Final Fantasy XI Online
3. Pikmin 2
2. Gran Turismo 4
1. Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater

Reading back Mr. Miyamoto's comments in our interview with him on page 36, I was once again reminded of why he has either been directly responsible or at least involved in creating some of my favorite gaming experiences. His awareness of what's important in game creation simply goes beyond that of most developers. He truly is an artist among his peers. And I have to admit that I share some of his concerns about certain trends taking place in the American market. Namely, that of violence running amok in popluar games.

Of course, I'll be the first to admit that nearly every game features some form of violence, from destroying waves of alien spacecraft to bopping turtles out of their shells, but today, I think things are becoming slightly disturbing. Personally, I don't think it's healthy to sit there and simulate killing realistic looking and acting people in real world environments. Not that I would ever make the leap of faith that would implie that any game or movie or song can lead someone to commit an violent act. Those people are off to begin with. Rather, I suppose it is my wish that more people enjoyed games for reasons other than shock value violence. Naturally, developers make what people want, so if the public wants games which feature random acts of violence against civlians, then that's what they're going to get. But Miyamoto is different. He isn't satisfied with giving people merely what they want. He is more interested in giving them what they don't know they want yet.

However, Nintendo will have to find some way to appeal to this changing market if they want to maintain their consistently healthy profit margins. Either that, or they should just give up on competing with Sony and focus on a loyal and free spending niche market, like Apple Computer enjoys.

"Miyamoto isn't satisfied with giving people what they want. He is more interested in giving people what they don't know they want yet."

star play

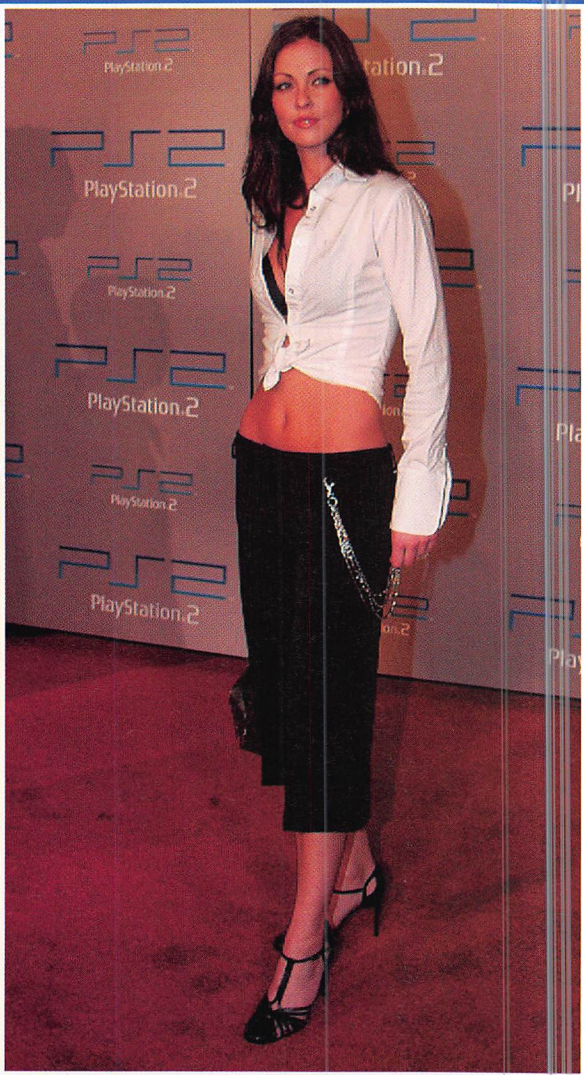
Sony's annual celebrity shindig was as star-spangled as ever

Lights. Camera. Pizzazz! With the start of E3 2003, things just wouldn't be right if Sony Computer Entertainment America didn't have their annual Pre-E3 VIP Celebrity event. Held at the exclusive Viceroy Hotel in Santa Monica, Playa Del PlayStation was in full swing with waterfalls, sandy beaches, Tiki torches and, of course, loads of celebs. With game industry guests kept to a minimum, **play** was one of a handful of publications allowed to attend. I know what you must be thinking—Cuban cigars, martinis, models, celebrities and a musical performance by 50 Cent and Dr. Dre—it was a tough night, believe me, but someone had to do it.

The highlight of any VIP event is being able to talk shop with the celebrities. Sure they come for the free booze and the chance to schmooze amongst themselves, but ultimately they were here for PlayStation. Sony has very skillfully introduced the world of videogames to Hollywood and celebrities are totally digging it. What used to be a geek thing to do is now a very "in" thing to do.

Amidst the drinking and revelry, I managed to sit and chat with a number of celebs about gaming. Did you know that Seann William Scott, aka Stifler, has played through GTA: Vice City three times? Or that Leonardo DiCaprio is a huge Gran Turismo fan? And did you know that Christian Slater is a big fan of the Medal of Honor games, says he "can't get enough of WWII games." With support like this from Hollywood, the videogame industry is going to continue to grow exponentially into the mainstream.

And if there is one thing I can always count on at these events, is getting some pretty candid comments from some of the celebrities. I thought I would share a couple here. Quite simply, these are too good to pass up. *–Tom Ham*



play: Yo Redman! Congrats on Def Jam Vendetta. You really know how to bring it, dawg.

Redman: Yeah man, thanks for the props. I love that game! I love messin' people up.

What other games you like to play?

Yo, I like games like Doom and shit. You know, killin' and shit.

What about Madden? You gotta love Madden.

Nah man, I'm probably the only rapper that doesn't play Madden. It's too complicated. Too many buttons and shit. Don't have time to learn that shit.

Aight dawg, that's cool, that's cool. Yo, some people have said that your finishing move isn't the greatest in Def Jam. How do you feel about that?

Yo, that's EA Sports' fault, dawg. You know what I wanted? Let me tell you man, after I pinned you, I wanted to have 10 fine bitches come out and kick the shit out of your balls, you know what I'm sayin? And I wanted to sit there and watch them f**k you up. That's what I wanted, but EA didn't want to do it.

You da man, dawg. Peace.

You gotta love the Redman for being so in touch with his feminine side.

play: Mr. Arquette, how are you this evening?
David Arquette: Fine man, how are you? This party is kicking!
Well you know, Sony PlayStation. They know how to do it up.
Yeah, they sure do!
So what are you playing these days?
Well you know, the usual, Madden, Grand Theft Auto, SSX Tricky and Gran Turismo.
Oh that's right, you were in Tricky. Great job by the way. I loved using your character. You were a total dick in the game!
<laughing> Yeah dude! It was a blast to help make that game. My kids will be able to play that game and hear me. That's too cool for words. I love EA Sports BIG. They really did a great job.
Hey, so are you going to in SSX 3?
SSX 3? They're making another SSX game?
Eh...yeah, they're showing it tomorrow at E3. I played it a couple of weeks ago, it's pretty dope. The visuals blow away Tricky.
You mean, EA Sports is making another SSX game and they didn't call me? <Yelling> Those guys are F****RS! I HATE EA SPORTS BIG! THEY NEVER CALLED ME!
Well, I think they called Lucy Liu back, since she has a new movie coming out.
<still yelling> NO F*****G WAY. I CAN'T BELIEVE EA SPORTS WOULD DO THAT TO ME.
Nah dude, I was just playing. I don't think they're using any celebrity talent this time around.
<now laughing> You're a f****r, dude! You got me! Hey, I gotta run, nice talking with you... EA Sports still sucks though. <laughing>

game gallery

While there obviously isn't room to show every game shown at this year's E3, this is a fair sampling of what looked promising to us

Kya: Dark Lineage

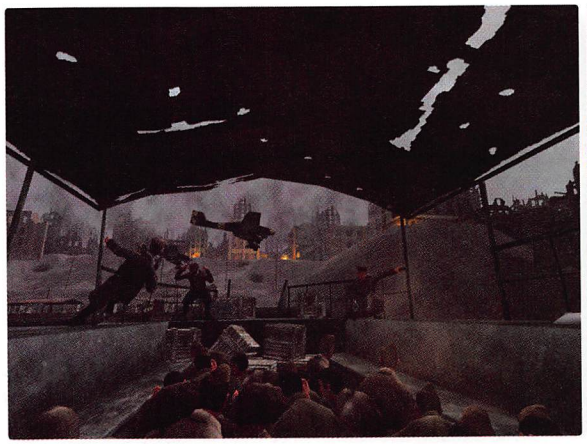
system: ps2, xbox, gc • **developer:** eden studios
publisher: atari • **available:** winter

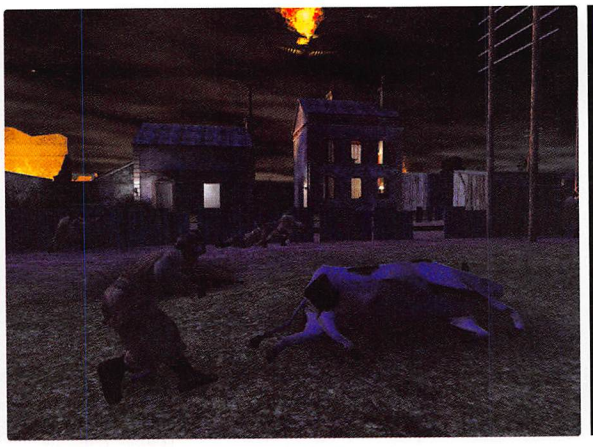
Eden Studios' first platformer looks better every time we see it, blowing us away yet again at this year's E3. The game's combat is superb but only a fraction of the appeal; the sliding and free-fall gameplay is also stunning and the worlds are massive and always in full view. With 34 principal and side quests across nine massive and highly-aesthetic environments, Kya looks poised to take the holidays by storm. -DH

Trinity

system: xbox, pc • **developer:** gray matter
publisher: microsoft • **available:** 2004

Another first-person shooter; you know the drill. This one is powered by the Return to Castle Wolfenstein team, so you know there's potential. Premise: you're genetically mutated, so you've got juiced strength and ability. The big feature is Flash, which manipulates space-time for added gameplay benefits. Set in New Orleans, the game captures a unique visual flair. -BF





Call of Duty

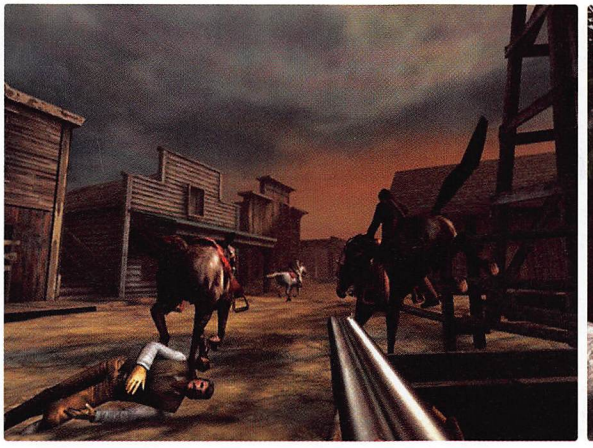
system: ps2 • **developer:** infinity ward
publisher: activision • **available:** nov

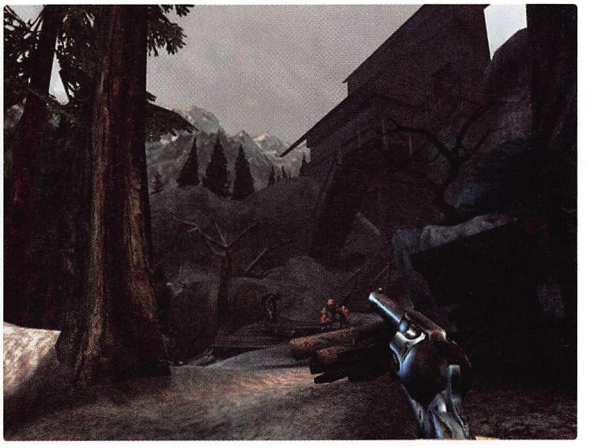
Activision obviously holds high respect for Medal of Honor: Allied Assault, because you couldn't take a look at Call of Duty without the mention of the over 20 heavy-hitters who left EA's awesome FPS series to craft a new game of similar tone. The game opens through the eyes of an American paratrooper from the 101st Airborne, eventually handing the duties off to Russian and British forces. Twenty-four missions are bound by four interlocking campaigns. -BF

Dead Man's Hand

system: xbox • **developer**: humanhead
publisher: atari • **available**: fall

Of all the FPS games on hand at E3, and there were a ton, this is one is for me. Using the latest Unreal technology, this stunner of an old west adventure puts you in the boots of El Tejón, a master gunslinger riding with his posse, The Nine, in a story of betrayal and vengeance. From the saloons to the stunning horseback gameplay, DMH looks and smells as bad-ass as you can possibly imagine. -DH

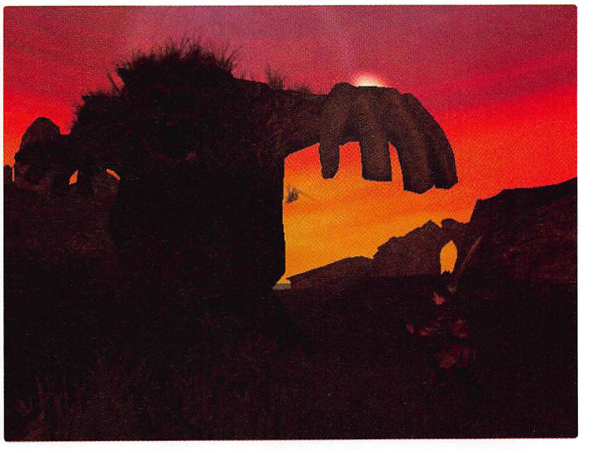




Fable

system: xbox • **developer**: mgs
publisher: microsoft • **available**: spring

Peter Molyneux's really real-time, ego-building action/RPG looked absolutely amazing, although this is not a game you can even scratch the surface of at E3. It is, however, another reason why you have to own an Xbox these days. This game charts your growth from childhood to death; good or evil, brute or wimp—you truly decide your fate. You don't see that everyday. -DH



Conker: Live & Uncut

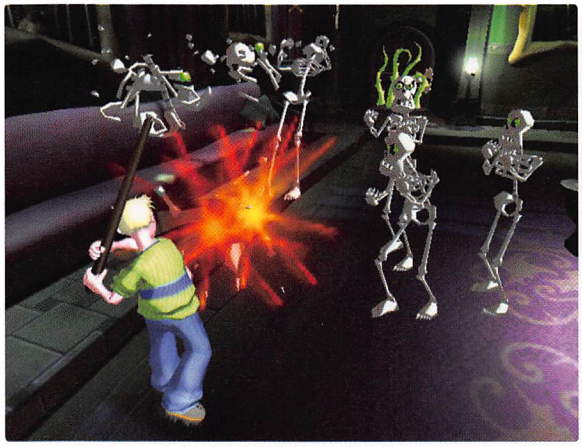
system: xbox • **developer**: rare
publisher: microsoft • **available**: tba

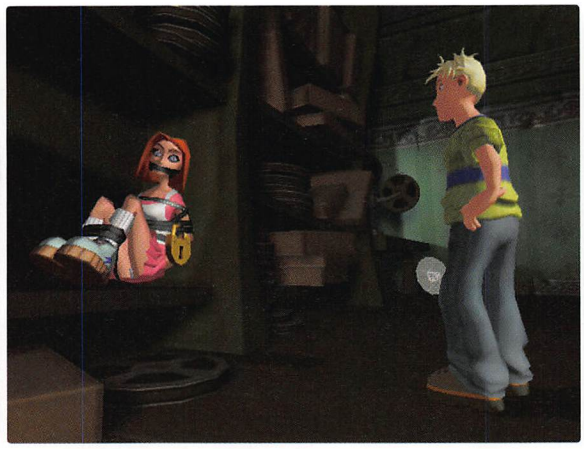
Imagine a story-driven, team-focused, Xbox Live-enabled Conker blowing the stuffing out of anything that moves. Now imagine the poo and beer-filled nastiness of Bad Fur Day completely re-built on Xbox to take full advantage of the hardware. There most definitely is a God, and I think he's British! Light 'em if you got 'em! Rare's sole E3 shocker almost made it worth having to be in LA for a week. Almost. -DH

Kameo: Elements of Power

system: xbox • **developer**: rare
publisher: microsoft • **available**: spring '04

Kameo is as beautiful as games get; the universe dripping with color, shadows, leafy vegetation and super detailed character models. Kameo herself is a wonder to behold as well... until you're forced to abandon your shapely fairy to actually play the game, first as a vegetable—or flower or whatever it is—and then as a rock. Not a rock monster; a friggin rock. So it's "innovative"; it's also pretty lame. I'm positive this game will be a work of pure genius, I just won't be playing it. -DH





Grabbed by the Ghoulies

system: xbox • **developer**: rare
publisher: microsoft • **available**: winter

Cooper (looking way too much like Rascal) must battle his way through a haunted mansion to rescue his girlfriend who has been...grabbed by the ghoulies. A chimp can play; the game employs the two analog sticks, and that's it, to fight and throw stuff at spooks, which seems it would get old in about five minutes, no matter how pretty. It's Rare though, so we'll see. -DH

Legacy of Kain: Defiance

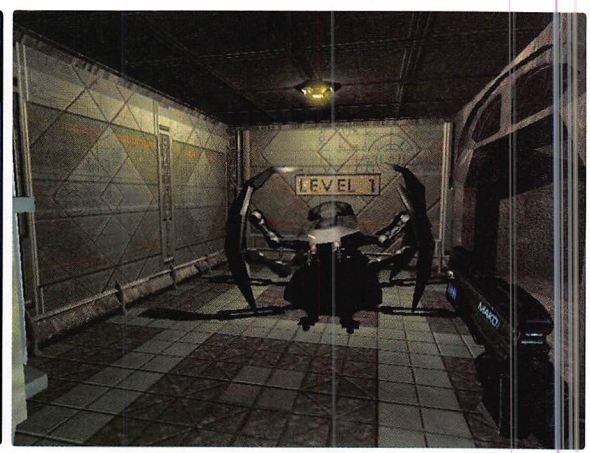
system: ps2, xbox • **developer**: crystal dynamics
publisher: eidos • **available**: fall

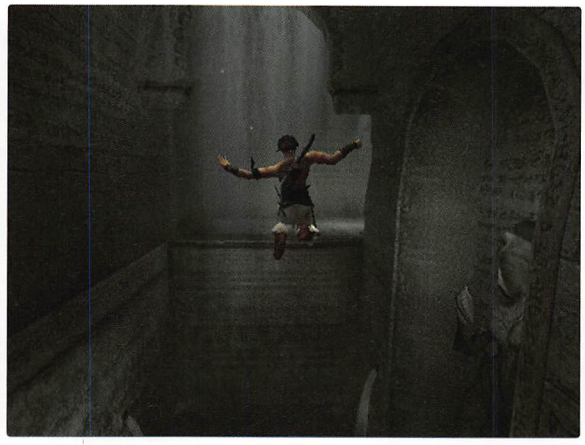
Had I stepped through a time portal to a time when Crystal Dynamics was at their vampiric best? Apparently so, as I witnessed the lush gothic undertones of Defiance, which seems to embody the original (and still best) Kain, along with a return to the adventuring roots of Raziel; united to vanquish Hylden—an entity so evil they must join forces. Damnation never looked so good. -DH

Deus Ex: Invisible War

system: pc, xbox • **developer**: ion storm
publisher: eidos interactive • **available**: summer '03

Deus Ex was a quiet success within its dedicated fanbase, and Invisible War sheds the dead weight of the original for an even more involving adventure. It's in the first-person, but this technologically impressive sequel carries a lot of adventure along for the ride, and the customization within the detailed emphasis of the game's story makes it even deeper. Like Doom 3, volumetric lighting brings the world to immersive life. -BF





Prince of Persia

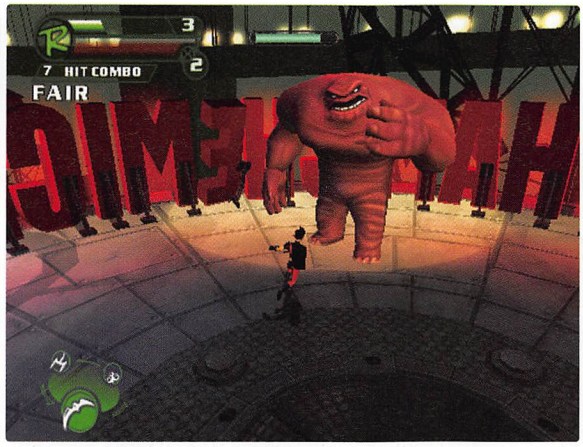
system: ps2, xbox, gc • **developer**: ubi soft montreal • **publisher**: ubi soft • **available**: nov

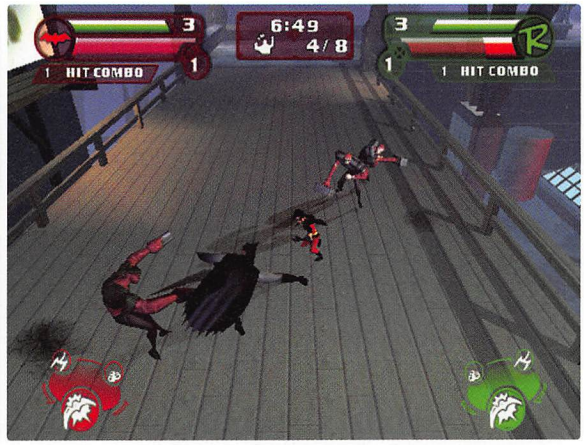
The first thing that comes to mind is Ico—think that same blinding lighting, a similar way of structuring the complexity of the platform-heavy exploration. End the comparison. The spirit of the classic from which Prince of Persia was spawned goes full 3D, and the result is fantastic. One of the more interesting elements is the ability to reset missteps. The game is reaching ambitiously towards presenting a truly fresh experience while providing staple building blocks for support. Even pressing a switch is rethought, requiring, say, a running wall flip. -BF

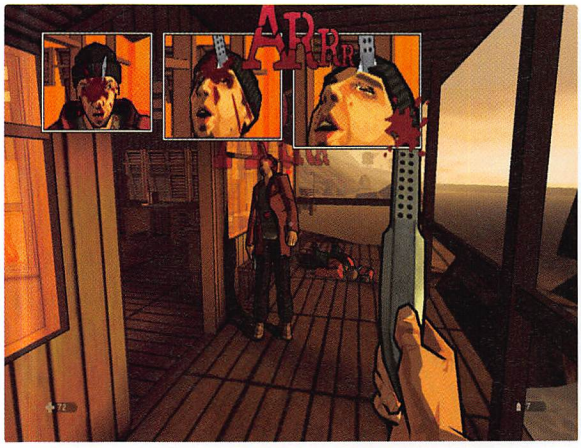
Batman Rise of Sin Tzu

system: ps2, xbox, gc • **developer**: ubi soft
publisher: ubi soft • **available**: winter

Countering the bad taste left by DT, Ubi has risen up to save Batman from obscurity with possibly the best Batman game ever created. With character designs from renowned comic book artist Jim Lee, Sin Tzu is the first Batman character to ever debut in a video game, and the pseudo-overhead 3D action was blisteringly fun, playing alone or teamed up with Nightwing, Batgirl or Robin. -DH



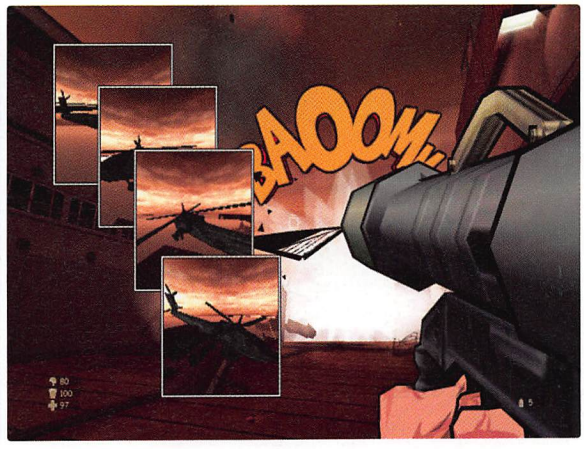


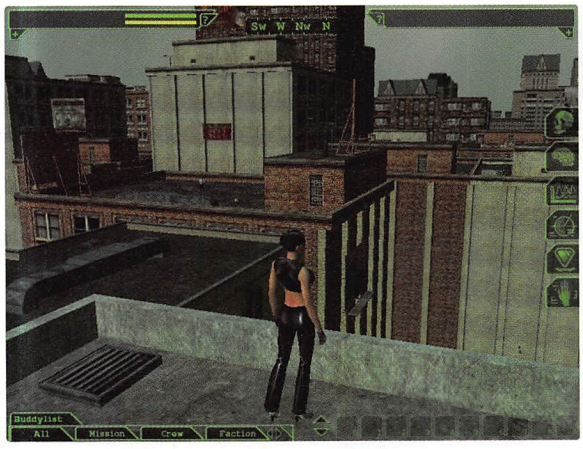


XIII

system: ps2, xbox, gc, pc • **developer**: ubi soft france **publisher**: ubi soft • **available**: fall '03

The President's been assassinated, and for some reason, you're part of the fallout, waking up on a beach with a bullet wound leaving you to battle amnesia. The only thing you do remember is that you know how to use cool guns and pop hitmen. You're also a man of wicked style, living in a comic-book world that no first-person shooter has even attempted before. -DH





Matrix Online

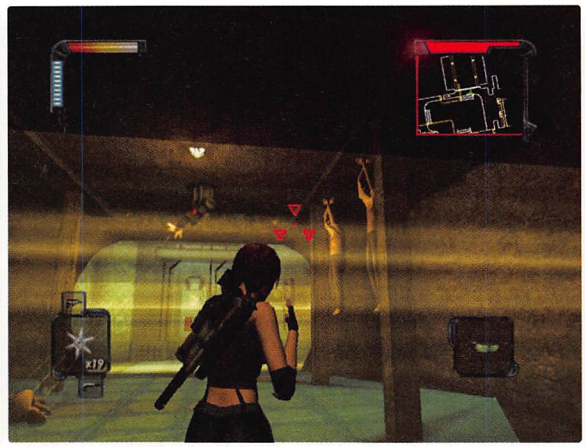
system: pc • **developer**: monolith productions/eon
publisher: ubi soft • **available**: 2004

And this hasn't been capitalized on already because...? In theory, an online Matrix game could absolutely suck our souls dry with its ability to pull us into its universe. The story and even the game's content are being handled by Warner Bros. Everything picks up from where the final movie leaves off, creating a place of martial-arts combat and dialoguing between millions of potential users. It's a ways off before the full details will emerge, but the possibilities are certainly intriguing. -BF

LOTR: Return of the King

system: ps2, xbox, gc, gba • **developer**: ea redwood shores **publisher**: ea • **available**: nov

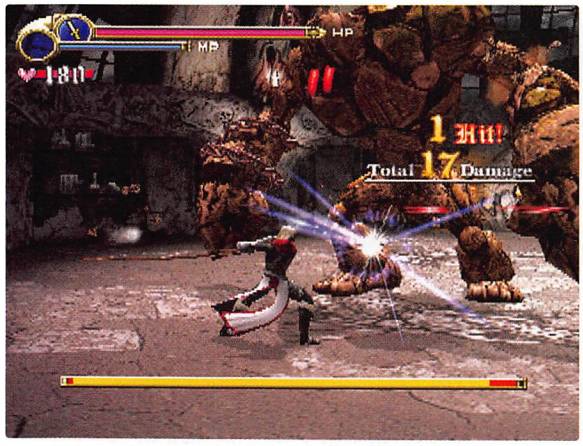
Take the mad chaos of The Two Towers, add more mad chaos, make it even prettier—for crap's sakes, this game looks good—and you've got an awesome sequel. The opening sequence was fully playable, showcasing a huge emphasis on scripted action and omnipresent action. More variety has been added to the gameplay, along with several new characters and co-op play. -BF



Rogue Ops

system: ps2, xbox, gc • **developer:** bits studio ltd.
publisher: kemco • **available:** q4

Looks like Lara, no? Hell yes it does. Kemco is hoping Nikki Connors' first adventure will have a Tomb Raider-like effect on Kemco, as the ex-Green Beret sets out on her quest for vengeance battling a group of terrorists known as Omega 19 after one of their bombs claims the lives of her husband and daughter. God, that sounds familiar. The game looks great, so stay tuned. -DH



Castlevania: LoI

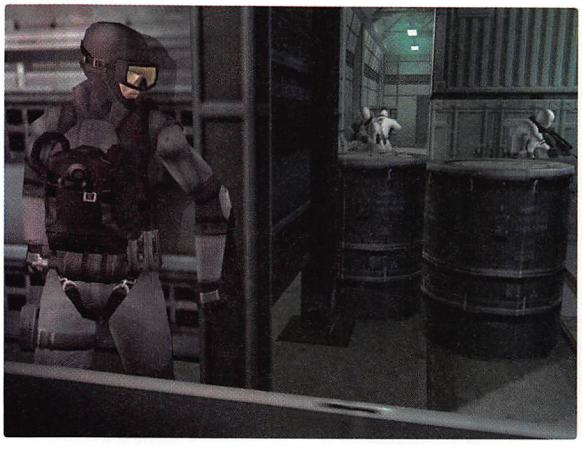
system: ps2 • **developer:** kcet
publisher: konami • **available:** oct

Forming an opinion about a new Castlevania based on one level surrounded by rock concert-decibel noise is like sampling fine wine with a mouthful of head cheese. Still, the linear five-hub game promises a return to classic CV gameplay (bravo that I say), devoid of Metroidian hues and with a more straightforward action/platforming attack. With Iga producing and Yamane (SotN) on sound design, the verdict is heaven on earth. -DH

Gradius V

system: ps2 • **developer:** kcet
publisher: konami • **available:** winter

The triumphant return of one of the greatest shooting series of all time is without a doubt the single most beautiful 2D shooter known to man. Employing every Gradius trademark (undoubtedly up, up, down, down, left, right, left, right, etc, does something), the reinvention is reason to celebrate for any fan of this long forgotten genre. Say hello to the Vic Viper again this winter. -DH



Metal Gear Solid: Twin Snakes

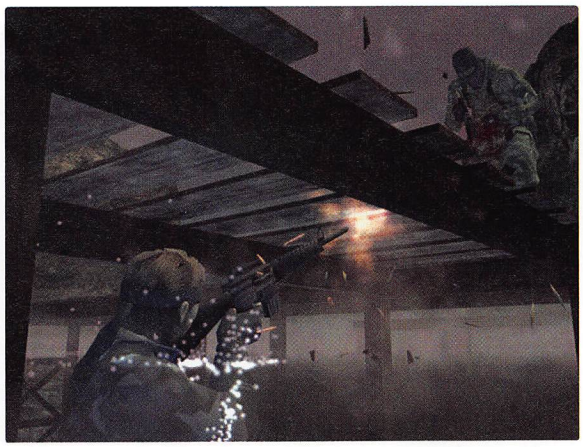
system: gamecube • **developer:** silicon knights
publisher: konami • **available:** nov

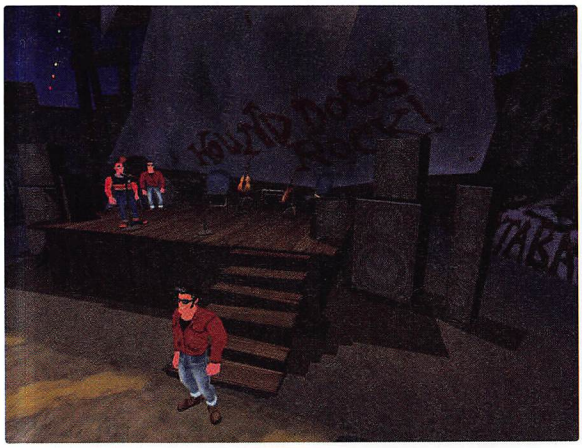
Rather than being an all-new game on the 'Cube, The Twin Snakes is a remake of the original (and best) MGS game, only with the play mechanics of Sons of Liberty thrown in. While it's unknown if there will be any new gameplay elements, new cutscenes are being created and new voicework is being done; don't worry, David Hayter still plays Snake. This collaboration between Konami, Nintendo and Silicon Knights bodes well for the future. -CH

Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater

system: ps2 • **developer**: kcej
publisher: konami • **available**: 2004

Hideo Kojima decided Snake (?) must continue his tactical espionage after all, taking the action into the lush jungle and revamping the gameplay for more complexity and varied scenarios. While the criticisms surrounding the last game weren't too harsh, Kojima has listened in an effort to better blend the storytelling into the presentation and place more emphasis on the mechanics of the game. As expected, the new graphics engine is phenomenal. -BF

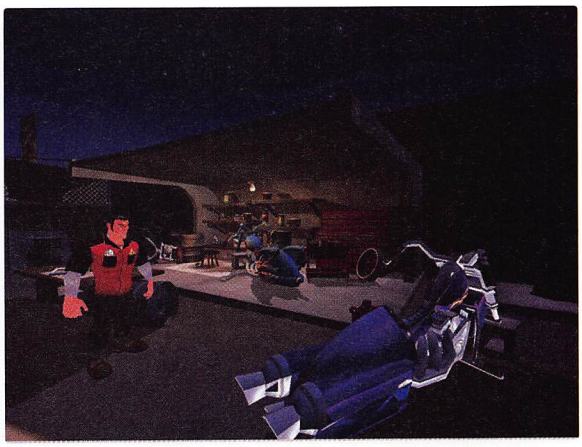




Full Throttle

system: ps2, xbox, pc • **developer**: lucasarts
publisher: lucasarts • **available**: winter

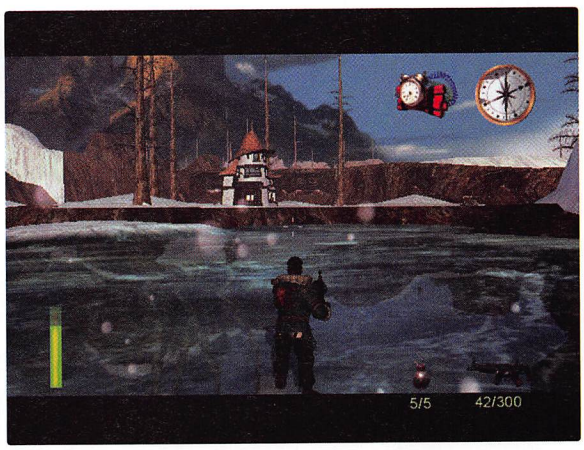
Ben is back and he'll be damned if anyone's gonna mess with his home turf: El Nada. Adventuring through the game's surreal and desolate landscape, FT embodies Monkey Island-style character interaction with real-time brawling and Road Rash-style highway debauchery on the back of Ben's tricked-out Corley hog. Join dad Torque, Maureen Corley and Ben's gang, the Polecats, as the murderous plot unfurls. This one looks crazy fun. I smell George's next film... -DH



Armed and Dangerous

system: xbox, pc • **developer**: planet moon studios
publisher: lucasarts • **available**: winter '03

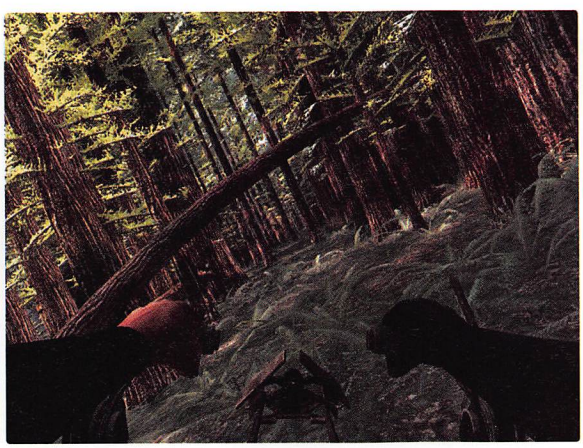
From the playful brains of Giants creators Planet Moon comes Armed & Dangerous, a third-person action game that works tons of humor into the ceaseless combat. This was one of the more classically rounded games at the show, feeling like something we were used to getting in 2D but now fully alive in a gigantic 3D universe. The spirit of Giants is alive and well. -DH

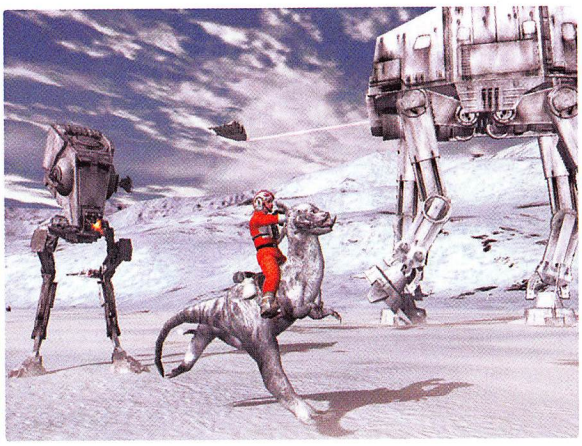


Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Strike

system: gc • **developer**: factor 5
publisher: lucasarts • **available**: fall '03

The big deal here is the new multiplayer support and the ability to leave your various fighters for ground battles. And of course the game looks amazing, with a ton more units onscreen and even more attention to the details of the beloved Star Wars universe. The dogfights are absolutely insane, and the game spans all three movies of the original trilogy, from Yavin to Endor. -BF





Wrath Unleashed

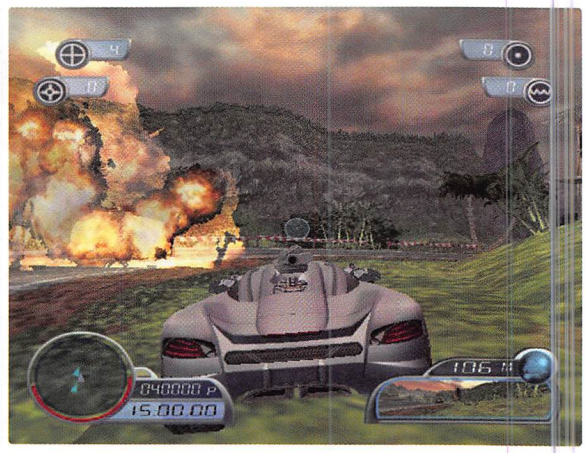
system: ps2, xbox • **developer:** lucasarts/the collective • **publisher:** lucasarts • **available:** winter

Attempting to perfect the amalgam of fighting with strategy elements, LucasArts' Collective-bred Wrath Unleashed is definitely on the right path. Aside from being absolutely breathtaking visually, the game employs a truly captivating system, incorporating Tactics Ogre-like quests with a tantalizing balance of action and strategy in battle, putting players in command of an army of magical creatures while controlling a central beast type. -DH

Spy Hunter 2

system: ps2, xbox, gc • **developer:** midway **publisher:** midway • **available:** sept

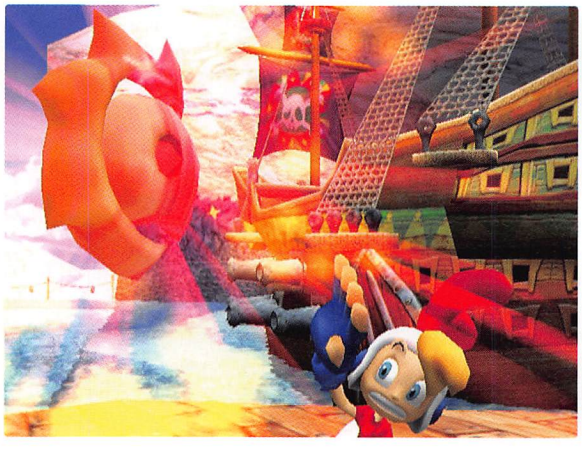
Spy Hunter landed with a solid reception, but it looks like the rough edges that did exist are receiving attention. Mission-based gameplay and fast vehicular combat maintain the series' style of play, with a completely redesigned G-8155 Interceptor carrying new firepower and transformations. The dynamically generated levels are actually different every time you play, so expect big replay. Pick-up-and-play arcade fun. -BF



I-Ninja

system: ps2, gc • **developer:** namco **publisher:** namco • **available:** tba

I've been longing for Namco to return to their roots— games like Rolling Thunder and Splatterhouse—and I-Ninja may be the first step in that direction. Using his un-ninja like mad skills, I-Ninja can not only scale buildings, fling shurikens, thrash with his chain attack and sword fight, he also grinds rails, hovers with his sword copter and trips around in rolling spheres in his platformer debut. -DH



Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg

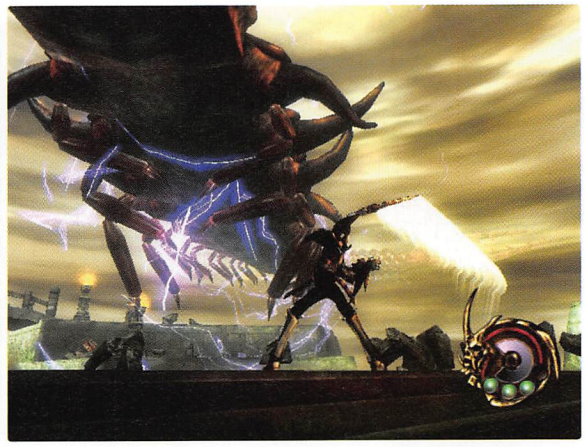
system: gc • **developer:** sonic team **publisher:** sega • **available:** q4

A few years ago, the mere announcement of a new Yuji Naka platformer used to send the gaming world into a deafening buzz. Nowadays they have a lesser effect overall, but an even greater one on the people who remember those wonderful times. I swore off chickens after Alfred Chicken, but with its Hermie Hopperhead implications and Naka-fied scenarios, Billy Hatcher had me at "cluck." -DH

Otogi: Myth of Demons

system: xbox • **developer:** from software
publisher: sega • **available:** q3

Otogi may actually make up for how crappy Vectorman (Sega should drop it like a Fox sitcom) and Altered Beast (please don't rise from your grave unless it's in 2D) looked. First Lost Kingdoms II, now this; From Software must have had a Starbucks move in across the street. Looking like the bastard offspring of Mystic Defender, the quest of undead warrior Raiko looked to bring action/role-playing to a dark place I want to go. -DH



Sonic Heroes

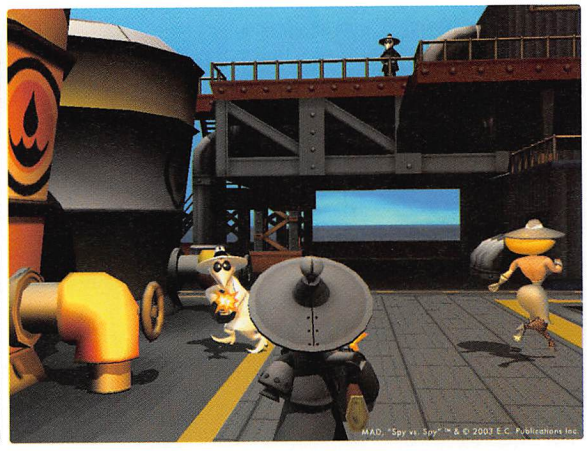
system: ps2, gc, xbox • **developer:** sonic team
publisher: sega • **available:** q1 '04

After dragging their hedgehog through the mud since the DC launch, Sega have finally decided to make a real Sonic update and is it ever the shizzle. Looking markedly better on Xbox, the new game utilizes Tails', Knuckles', and Sonic's play mechanics in tandem, darting around massive structures and landscapes that seem to go on forever...and never clip. Part old-school Sonic, part Chaotix, this is the Sonic we've been waiting almost a decade for. -DH

Spy vs. Spy

system: ps2, xbox, gc • **developer:** wayforward
publisher: tdk • **available:** q2 '04

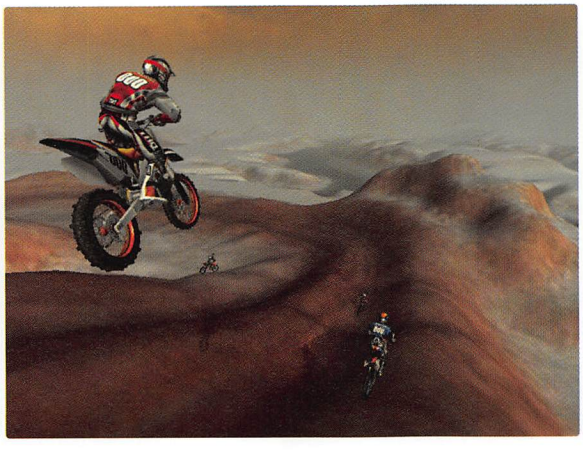
Our friends (and neighbors) at WayForward, hot off their awesome GBA debut Scorpion King, are tripping the light console-tastic with Mad Magazine's longest running and by far coolest gag, Spy Vs. Spy, penned by Antonio Prohias, who fled Cuba (narrowly escaping Castro's baddies) back in the '60s to NYC where he began his black spy vs. white spy comic. This will undoubtedly be a legendary multiplayer game. -DH

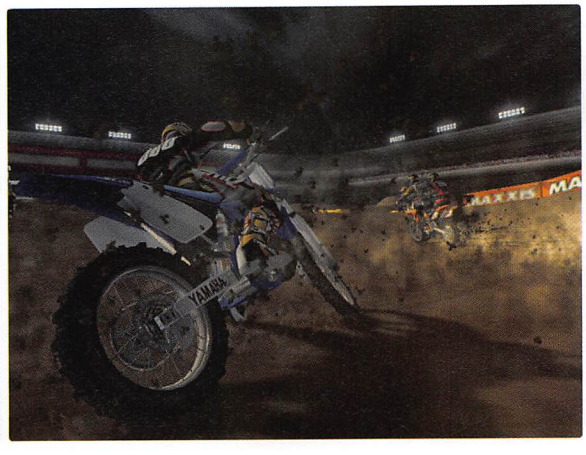


MX Unleashed

system: ps2, xbox • **developer:** rainbow studios
publisher: thq • **available:** fall

The reigning house of racing, Rainbow Studios, has finally gotten around to making a motocross game. Although still a bit early, the game played extremely well at E3, leading us to believe it may knock Ricky C. off of its throne. Of course, the Activision camp has other ideas. Freestyle icon Travis Pastrana's new game showed well too. -DH





Full Spectrum Warrior

system: xbox • **developer:** pandemic
publisher: thq • **available:** '04

The idea behind Full Spectrum Warrior was to create a game that soldiers could play and would translate into real battlefield knowledge; the result is a tactical simulator that takes "authentic" to a new level. The two squads of soldiers under your command are programmed to look and behave just like the real thing, and if you don't fight smart and follow proper procedures, then you'll all be going home in body bags. -CH

Starcraft Ghost

system: ps2, xbox, gc • **developer:** blizzard
publisher: vivendi/universal • **available:** q4 '03

Starcraft Ghost saw more early coverage than it probably needs, leaving plenty for us now that we've played it enough to know that it's what triple-A dreams are made of. Playing as Nova, a lethal Ghost operative trained in espionage and tactical combat, the missions range from solo sorties to epic battle scenarios, employing a mixture of tactical and adventuring elements amidst some of the most compelling gameplay to ever grace either genre. -DH

Buffy TVS: Chaos Bleeds

system: ps2, xbox, gc • **developer:** eurocom
publisher: vivendi/universal • **available:** august

Yes, they realize that they're up against a killer first game and yes, it's similar in design. Playing as Buffy, Willow, Faith, Spike, Xander or Sid the Dummy (!?) in a season five side story, the Scooby gang is out to seal a dimensional bleed opened for business by the root of all evil to consume humanity once and for all. I'd stake my Tivo on it: Buffy and company prevail. -DH

Tork

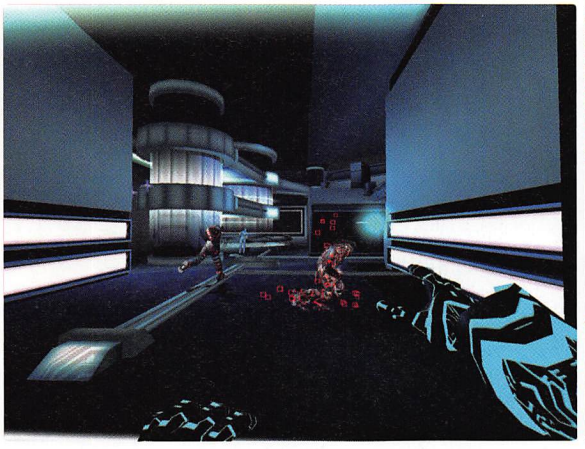
system: xbox • **developer:** tiwak
publisher: tba • **available:** sept

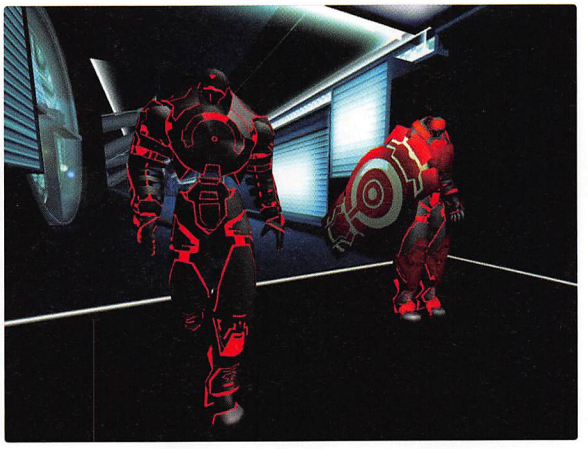
Buried deep in Kentia hall was my 2002 game of the show, dumped by Microsoft to make room for Vince. Why not two headlining platformers for '03, you ask? Well, so did I, and I get the sneaking suspicion there's more to Tork hitting the bricks then we'll ever know. But fear not, Tiwak has two deals in the works, so Tork will see release this year, and it is glorious! -DH

Tron 2.0

system: pc • **developer**: monolith
publisher: buena vista/disney • **available**: fall

One of the PC games I had to see this year was BV's Tron 2.0, and is it ever looking wicked. Based on the same universe as the movie, only brought up to current specs, the game incorporates FPS and racing elements bathed in eye-poppingly crisp neon colors. With Syd Mead on board as artistic consultant and Rebecca Romijn Stamos voicing the sexy heroine, I pray daily for the jump to console. -DH

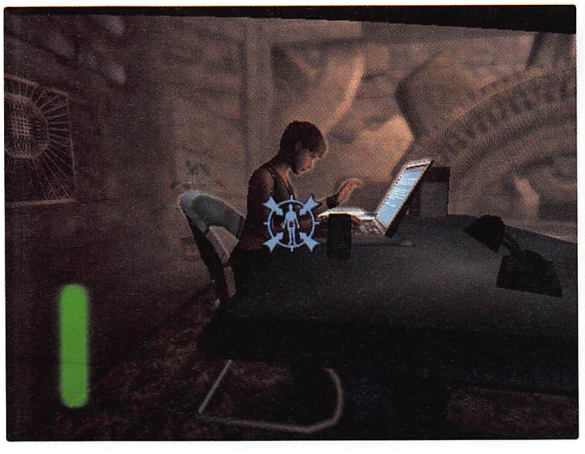




Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles

system: gc • **developer**: game designers studio
publisher: nintendo • **available**: fall

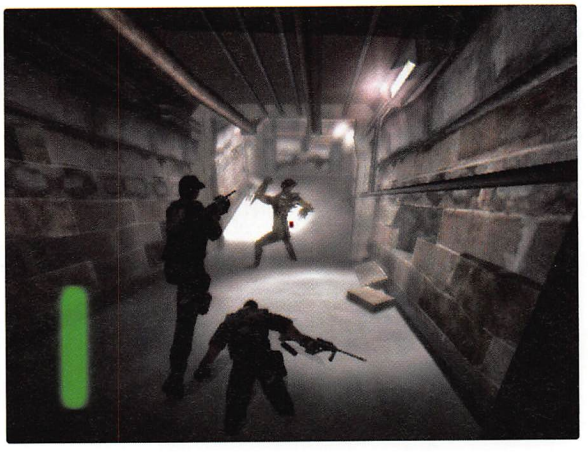
This was a sort of tough one to figure out in the brief amount of time we got to spend with the game at E3, but Crystal Chronicles is certainly not what you might have expected. It's an up to four player coopertative action-RPG, with each player using a GBA to control his or character on screen. Each player will be given unique information on his or her GBA screen, affecting the gameplay in ways that are still unclear. -MH



Geist

system: gc • **developer**: n-space
publisher: nintendo • **available**: fall

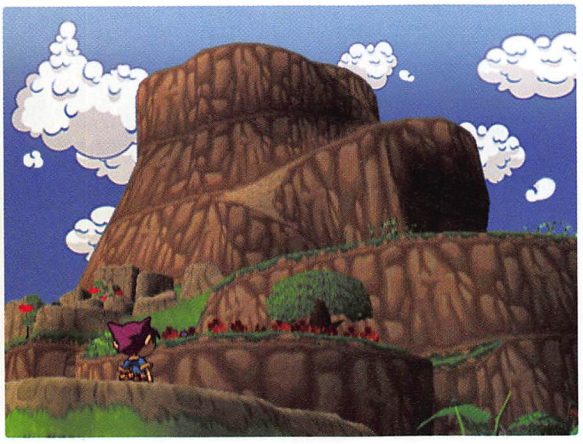
Not exactly the most common sight on GameCube, Geist is an original FPS. Developed by n-Space, makers of Duke Nukem: Time To Kill, Geist (which means ghost) allows players to possess other characters in the game, attaining their skills and strengths. This novel idea will enhance the fast FPS action and the game's stealth features. -MH



Giftpia

system: gc • **developer**: skip, ltd.
publisher: nintendo • **available**: tba

Gitpia is an RPG that attempts to turn the genre on its head. There are no battles, no typical leveling up, and no weapons. Instead, the player in Giftpia must endeavor to become a real adult. What does this mean? We don't know. But expect mini-games and odd jobs to rule the day, along with a wonderful and bright animation-style aesthetic. -MH



Star Fox 2

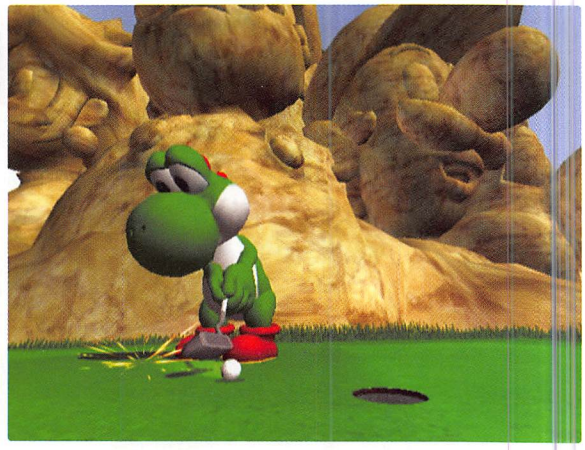
system: gc • **developer:** namco
publisher: nintendo • **available:** tba

Taking place a few years after the events surrounding Dinosaur Planet, Namco's contribution to the Star Fox legacy is indeed interesting. One to three players switch between the Arwing or Landmaster Tank, or battle on land in classic mission-based fashion. Disappointingly, only the three-player game was on display, so whether or not Star Fox 2 has one-player power remains to be seen. -DH

Mario Golf

system: gamecube • **developer:** camelot
publisher: nintendo • **available:** july

What can we say? We knew this was a title that Camelot would have to work hard at to ruin. And so it was that they took the easy route and made a great GameCube sequel that was instantly gratifying to play. Of course, you know what to expect with a Mario Golf, but that did little to quell the joy of playing this game and enjoying the vastly improved and diverse new Nintendo-land courses. -MH



Legend of Zelda: Four Swords

system: game boy advance • **developer:** nintendo
publisher: nintendo • **available:** tba

Basically, The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords takes the multiplayer mode from the recent GBA Zelda port, tosses in all-new levels and a new setting, and sets it loose on the GameCube. Gameplay is both cooperative and competitive, and when you duck into caves, the action jumps from the TV screen onto your GBA. Strangely, it uses the Super NES graphics engine, so here's hoping for value pricing. -CH

Kingdom Under Fire

system: xbox • **developer:** nc soft
publisher: nc soft • **available:** fall

The only non-MMORPG and the only console game in NC Soft's lineup, KUF is at once the single most beautiful RTS game I have ever seen but also the first and only one I will likely ever play, due to its real-time action attributes (you control your leader within the massive battles, Langrisser style). With up to 150 characters on screen, I simply cannot explain how grandiose this game is. -DH

Exarch

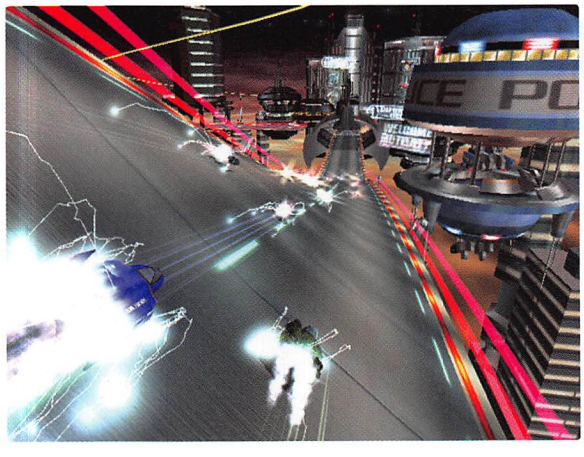
system: pc • **developer**: realm interactive
publisher: nc soft • **available**: winter

The MMORPG for design-minded people who wouldn't give the likes of Evergrace the time of day, Exarch features designs by comic book master Joe Madureira, along with fast-paced action/role-playing akin to Beyond Oasis. Looking more console than keyboard-tethered, with any luck, this one will go Xbox Live in the near future. -DH

Guild Wars

system: pc • **developer**: arena net
publisher: nc soft • **available**: q1 '04

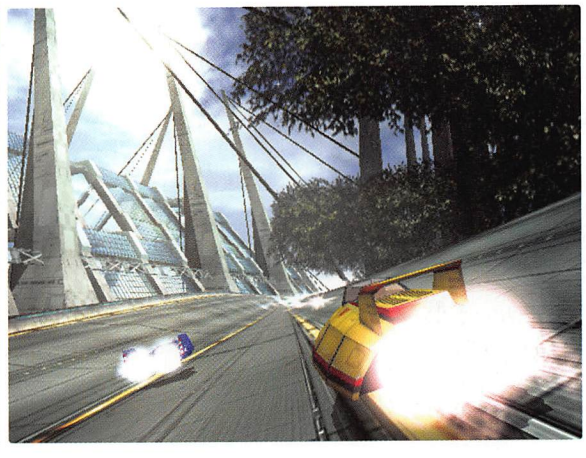
Big ups to Seattle-based ArenaNet—founded by key members of the Warcraft, StarCraft and Diablo teams (now that's pedigree!)—for what they are about to do, which is introduce their gorgeous new online RPG with no subscription fee. So confident you'll become immersed enough to expand your adventure, these guys are putting their money where their code is. Pat, Mike and Jeff, we salute you. -DH



F-Zero GX

system: gamecube • **developer**: sega
publisher: nintendo • **available**: fall

F-Zero has always been about one thing: speed. You should have seen how fast this new Sega-developed F-Zero was at E3. It was fantastic, with big, soaring levels that you zip along like a fuse being lit. It was almost too much to take, but with Sega at the helm and Nintendo's sensibilities lurking in the background, you can be sure that this will be a very rewarding game to play well. -MH



Onimusha: Blade Warriors

system: ps2 • **developer**: capcom
publisher: capcom • **available**: winter

The sleeper hit of Capcom's PS2 stable for '03 may be Blade Warriors, which incorporates characters from the entire Onimusha universe, bringing together famed Japanese actors Takeshi Kaneshiro as Samanosuke from Onimusha: Warlords and the late Yusaku Matsuda, known for his role in the 1989 film Black Rain, as Jubei Yagyu from Onimusha 2, as the main characters in the title. The three-deep fighting action supports one to four players and looked amazing. -DH

Resident Evil Outbreak

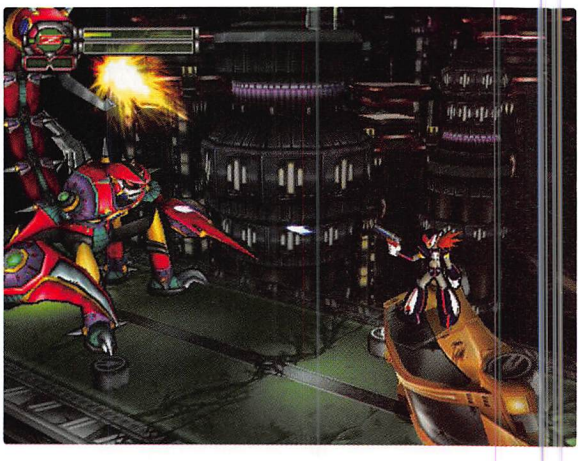
system: ps2 • **developer:** capcom
publisher: capcom • **available:** mar '04

It's an all-new variation on survival horror: online and with friends. Choose from one of eight characters, each with their own special abilities, and work together by solving puzzles, sharing items, and ultimately escaping the ever-deadly Raccoon City. If one player fails, he'll become infected, and will then continue the game trying to eat the flesh of his former allies. Mmm...flesh. Outbreak offers offline solo play as well. -CH

MegaMan X7

system: ps2 • **developer:** capcom
publisher: capcom • **available:** oct

Introduced back at last year's E3, Mega Man X7 redefines the classic series on PS2. Of course you'll still play as Mega Man X and Zero and still absorb the powers of fallen bosses, but now it's rendered with glorious cel-shading and the action takes place both in classic side-scrolling fashion and true 3D (a bit like Mega Man Legends). A mysterious new character, Axl, is also playable. -CH



Maximo: Army of Zin

system: ps2 • **developer:** capcom studio 8
publisher: capcom • **available:** fall

Continuing in the tradition of the original, adding more of everything you loved and hitting the dumpster with what you didn't (namely paying to save), Maximo vs. AoZ, was everything we expected it to be, employing new weapons, deeper gameplay, and even boxer functionality: that's right, they aren't just for wearing anymore! What we didn't expect was for the game to be so much bigger; they've super-sized it! -DH

Jak II

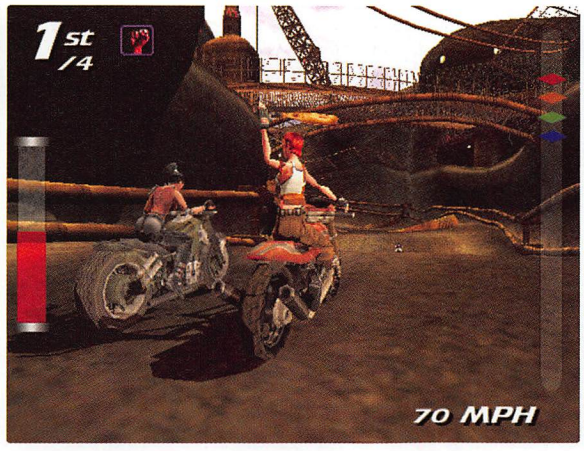
system: ps2 • **developer:** naughty dog
publisher: sony • **available:** october

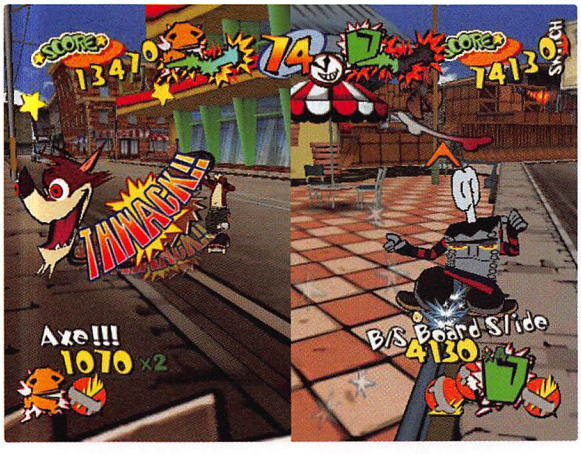
Another potentially huge success for the Sony action-adventure stable, this broad variation on the first game's look and feel is still pure Naughty Dog. Play mechanics and the world dynamic are deep and complex, and of course there resides an incredibly powerful engine pumping the visuals. There's going to be a huge fight for the genre crown this holiday... -BF

Jacked

system: ps2, gc, xbox • **developer:** 3do
publisher: 3do • **available:** fall

It's been way too long waiting for the successor to Road Rash, but it looks to be burning down the road, bloodied club in hand, courtesy of 3DO. Made better through evolving characters (the more you play, the meaner they get!), cool physics, and such lovely utensils as cattle prods, Jacked promises to finally reignite the racing/skull bashing genre! -DH

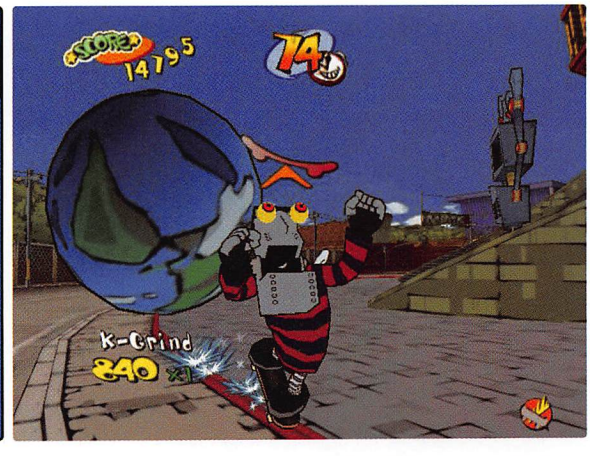


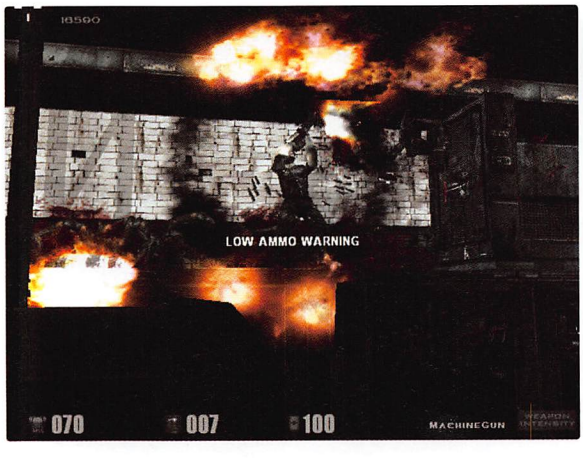


Go! Go! Hypergrind

system: gamecube • **developer:** team poponchi
publisher: atlus • **available:** q4 2003

This is what I call one f'd up game. Go! Go! Hypergrind is basically what Tony Hawk would be in bizarro world and on some serious hallucinogen. Choose from 12 whacked-out characters created by SPUMCO (of Ren & Stimpy fame), then unleash combo moves that consist of, for example, crashing into an outhouse and getting covered in feces, lighting yourself on fire and then being decapitated. -CH

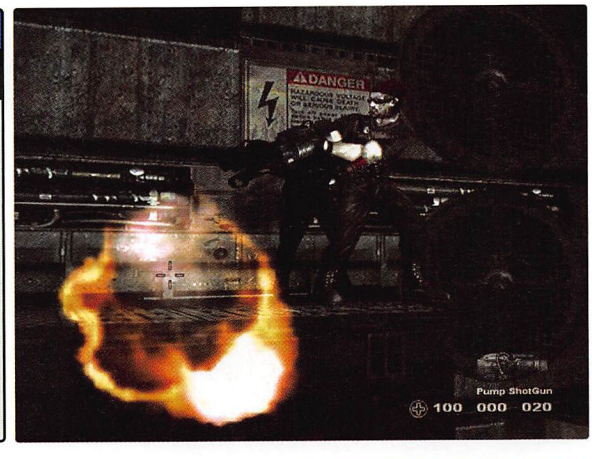




Blowout

system: ps2, xbox, gc • **developer:** majesco
publisher: majesco • **available:** october

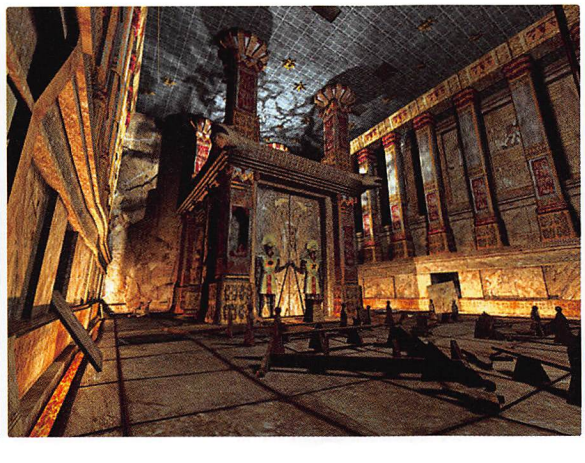
Will that be the 20mm pump-action shotgun or the 75-pound industrial chainsaw, sir? Looking like a darker Contra set in a dirty metallic 2D setting, Blowout is one sweet-looking run-and-gun actioner. The distinct manga flavor comes through big time as you blast bugs and even the backgrounds looking for any means of survival. This may be Majesco's best game yet... Throw agent BloodRayne in this engine and we can talk. -DH



Conan

system: ps2, xbox, gc • **developer:** cauldron
publisher: tdk • **available:** q4

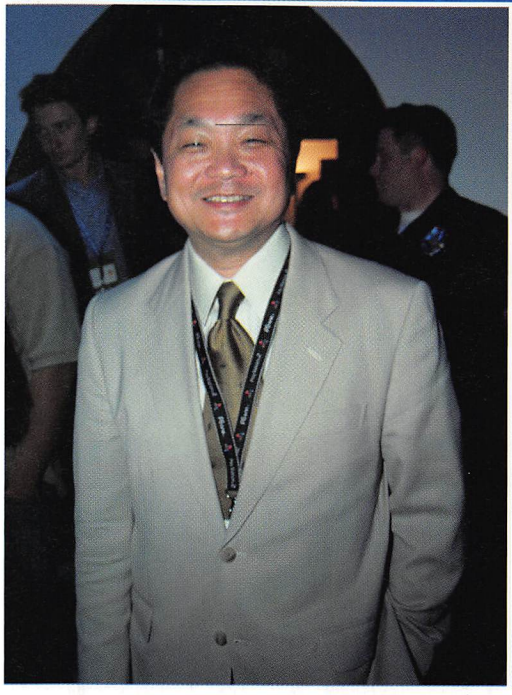
The game that could put TDK on the map picks up where the first Conan flick left off back when no one knew what the hell Arnold was saying, but didn't care as long as he was kicking the crap out of something. Renowned developers from the Slovac Republic, Cauldron, are crafting the tale written by Jan Kantùrek, who brings a wealth of Conan experience from translating the books. When asked to comment, Arnold exclaimed "I'm an act-uh, not a bah-barian!" -DH

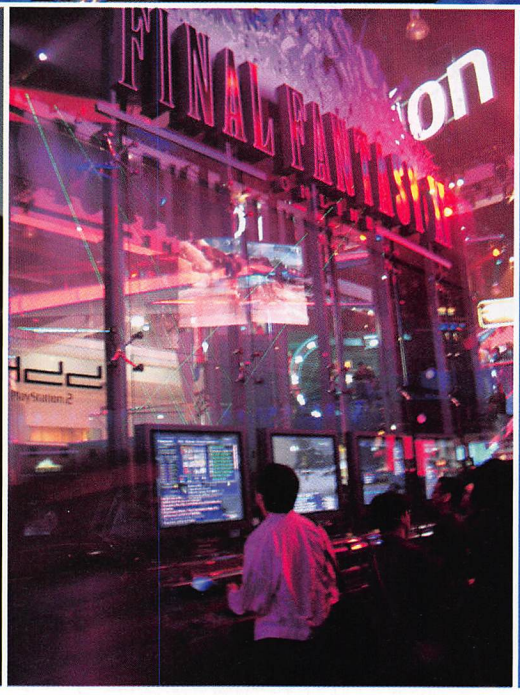


game show!

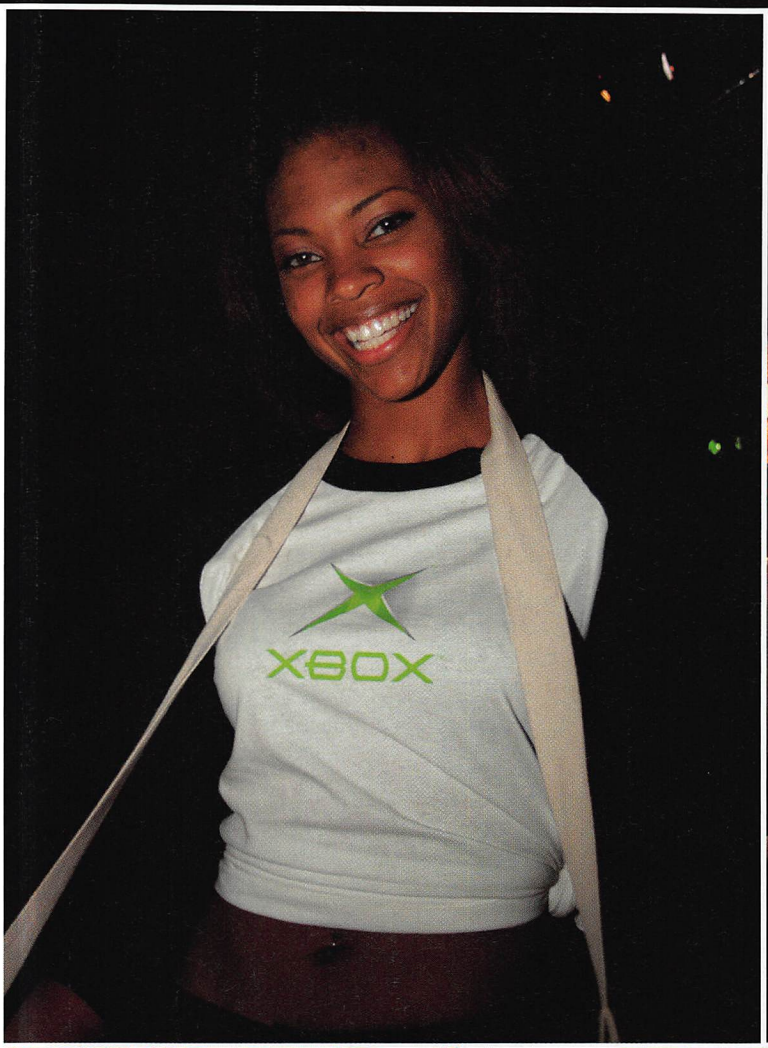
For three days the game industry becomes one big, very loud city

photos michael tran





Far Left: Ken Kutaragi, father of the PlayStation and President of Sony Computer Entrtainment beams for the camera. He has reason to.
Left: Playing Final Fantasy XI Online in the hot, noisy LA Convention Center...standing up... This is living!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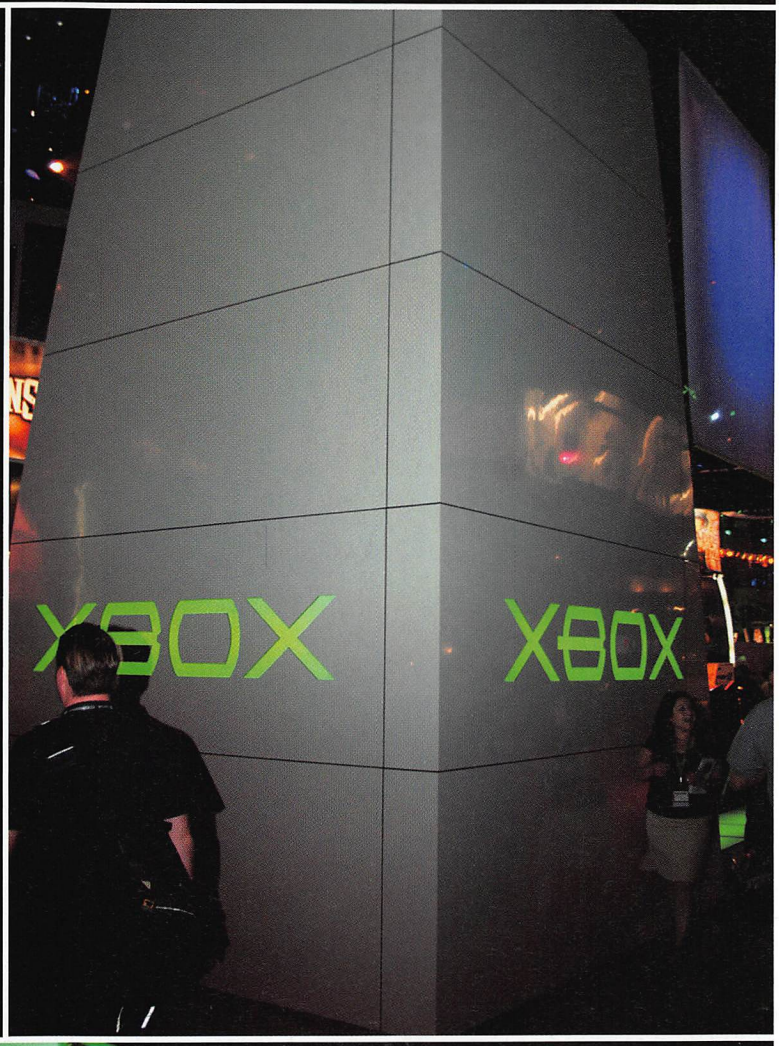
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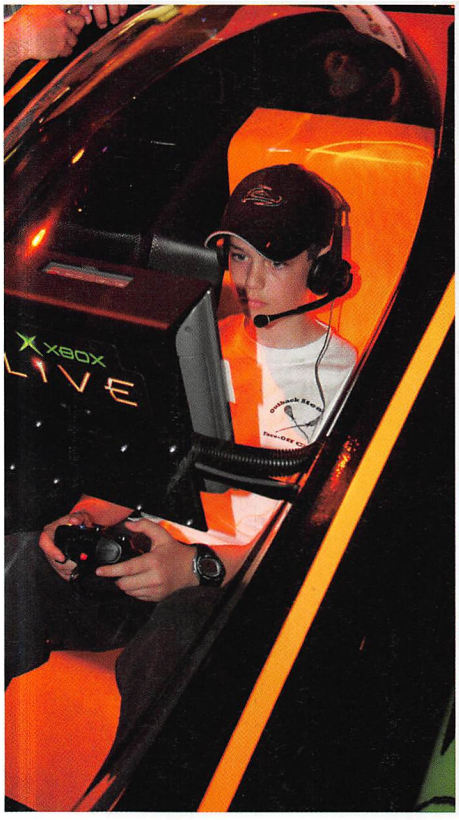
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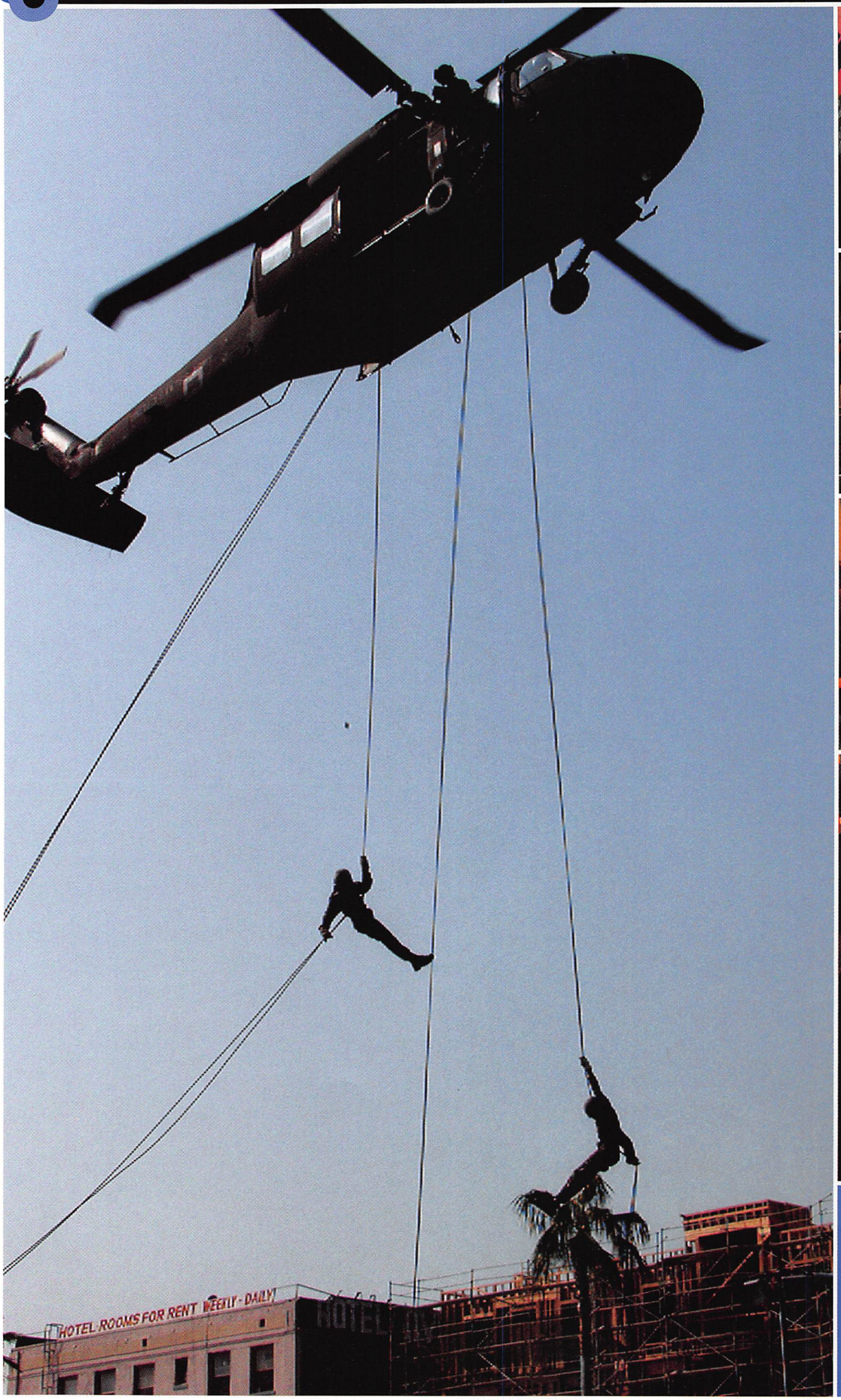
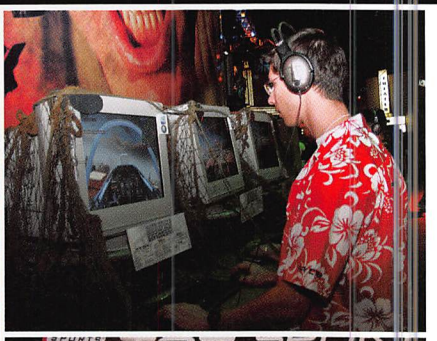
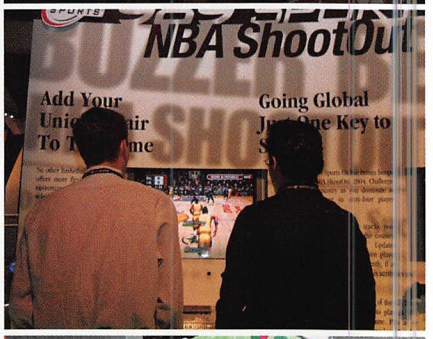
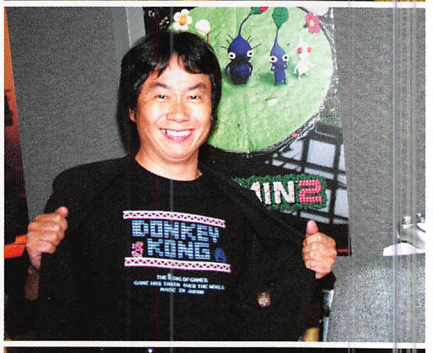
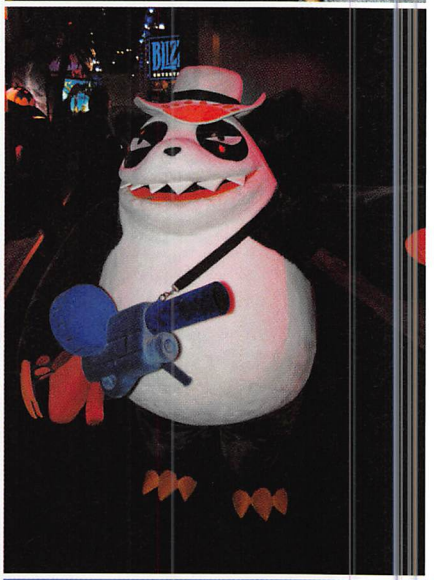




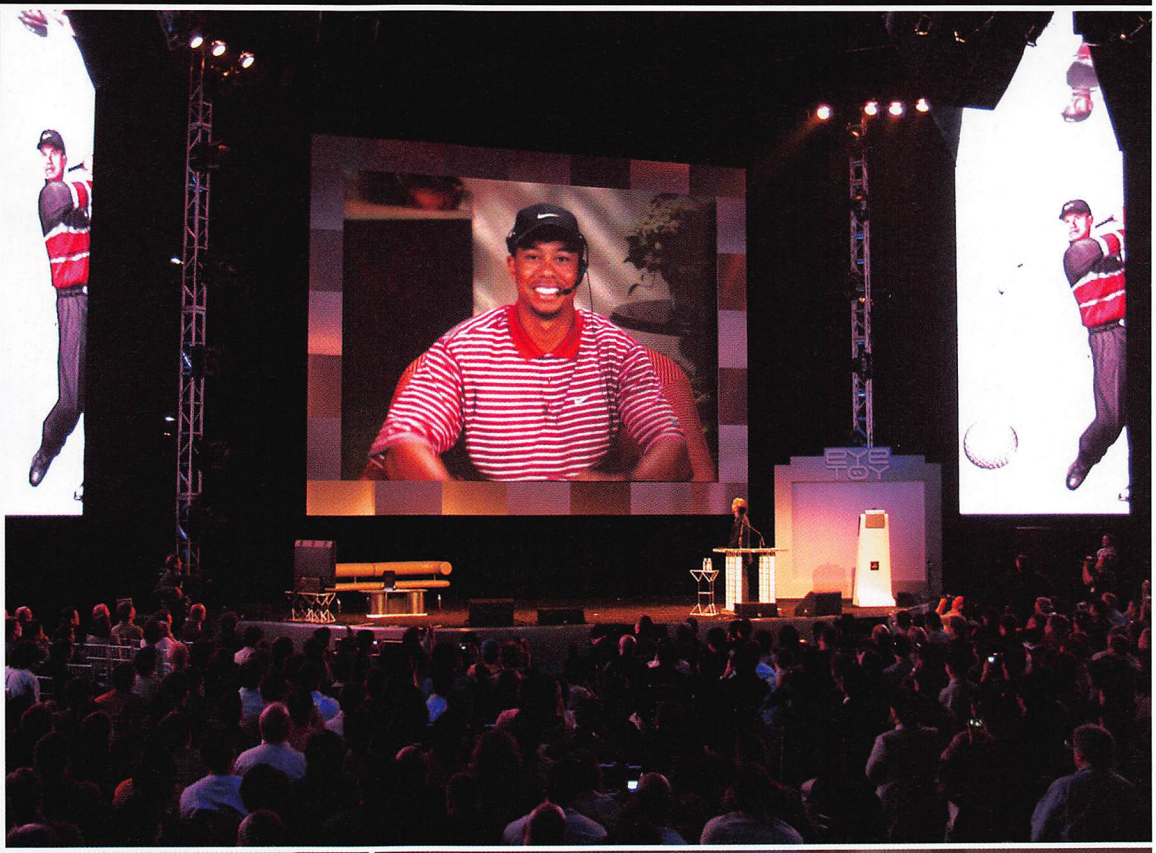


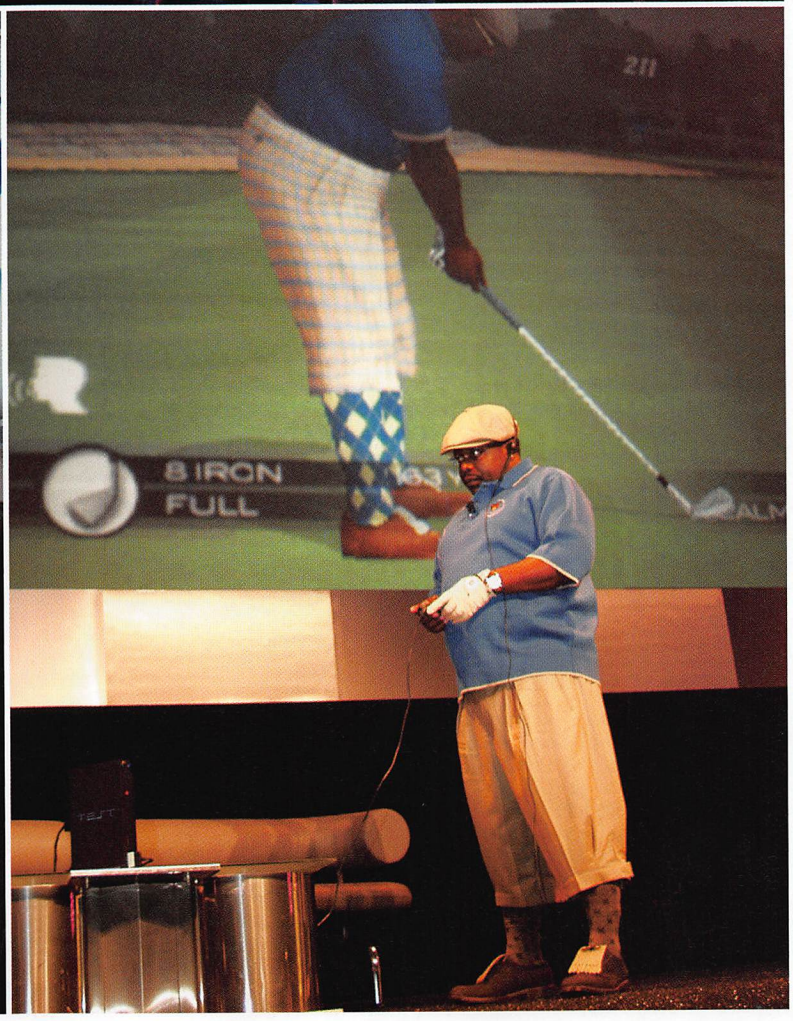




Miyamoto shows DK pride...a seriously warped, armed panda...and people jumping out of helicopters. Talk about eclectic.

Right: Tiger and Cedric bring down the house at the Sony press conference.
Below: Shannon Elizabeth wonders what went wrong in her career to end up at a trade show full of shut-ins that saw American Pie eight times on DVD.





And it's far, far better than the first?

Half-Life 2

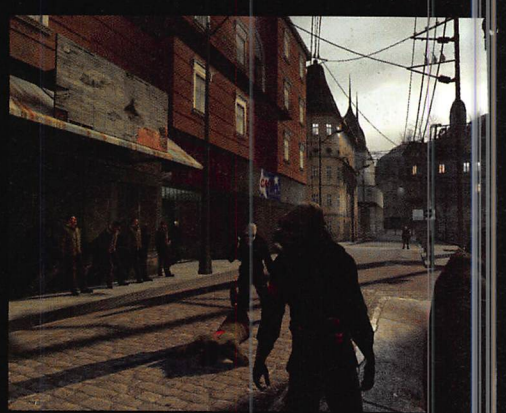
words tom ham

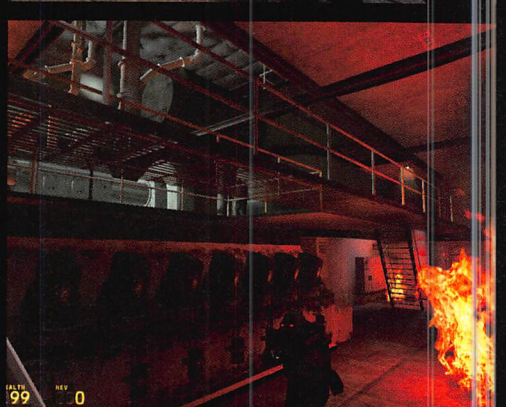
Anticipation to the point of insanity—that's what I felt as I sat in Valve Software's offices earlier this month. I wasn't there to check out the latest version of Counter-Strike or Team Fortress 2 (although that would've been nice); I was there to check out Half-Life 2. Umm, that's right, freaking Half-Life 2, the sequel to one of the biggest games of all time. And while you're here, boys and girls, let's get this little detail out of the way: it's coming out late September. "Our ship target is September 30 of this year," says Gabe Newell, founder and managing director of Valve Software. "We started working on Half-Life 2 right after we shipped Half-Life 1. It's what most of us have been working on here." Are you pissing your pants yet?

Without question, the original Half-Life forever changed the way people played first-person shooters. If I could have a dollar for every person that compared subsequent FPS games to Half-Life, I'd be a millionaire. What made it so special? The incredible way the story was told, specifically through the use of brilliantly placed scripted sequences and cut-scenes. "The same people who worked on the Half-Life 1 story were involved in Half-Life 2," continues Newell. "You aren't really clear at first how much time has passed, and that's part of the setup for the game." Needless to say, Valve Software is pretty tight-lipped about the storyline and wouldn't release very many details about it. Here is what we managed to scrape so far. Players will once again step into the shoes of Gordon Freeman, former Black Mesa research associate turned lean, mean fighting machine. Now working for the mysterious G-Man from the original Half-Life (remember, he offered you a job with the government at the end of the game), Gordon is partnered up with hottie Alyx Vance. Although you won't be able to control her in the game, she's an indispensable member of your team. "Alyx's mother was one of your fellow scientists killed at Black Mesa," explains Newell. "In terms of how she fits in the story, she helps bridge the worlds of Black Mesa and the darker world of Half-Life 2. There are a lot of people in the game with you; Alyx is the one you end up spending the most time with." And speaking of other characters, some of the original Half-Life 1 characters will return, including the G-Man (obviously), Barney the security guard and a few select scientists.

"Half-Life 2 should take people about as long to play as the original," continued Newell. "It depends a lot on the player since we saw a lot of variation in the amount of time it would take people to play the first game." As of right now, Half-Life 2's storyline will have 12 chapters with each chapter taking up to four hours to complete.

For Half-Life 2, Valve is using an internally developed engine called Source. Where the original Half-Life was built on a modified version of the Quake II engine, Valve has upped the ante so to speak and has developed an engine that will make you forget about Doom III. "We had a set of problems we wanted to solve in acting, in creating an interactive world, in AI, and in rendering," explains Newell. "These were all related to the core issue of doing a better job of bridging the narrative and interactive experiences. The tricky part is getting everything to work together. For example, let's take a three-legged 40-foot tall creature we call the Strider. Let's put him outside on a displacement mapped subdivision surface that gives us really big, fast outdoor spaces. You now need to have him walk on that surface as the mesh tessellates (the closer you are, the more detailed the surface). He needs to be able to walk on top of cars or trucks that get in his way (kinematics) and he needs to be able to navigate complex spaces with complex methods (uses physics to break things; ducks under other things that he can't break), and then when you destroy him he needs to seamlessly move from the AI of animation to the physics of collapsing and bouncing on an arbitrary surface. Most of the problems we thought were really interesting haven't been tackled in other engines. We





would have had to build a very different game without the capabilities of our Source engine."

The Source engine will also incorporate a next-generation physics simulation as well. Now everything in the world will have a "property" and can be used to manipulate other things in the world. "The tools we give you to drive physics into the world are my favorite weapons in the game right now," says Newell. "As we've explored new gameplay mechanics, such as adding physics, we get to create the tools that let you interact with those parts of the game. You're physically simulated, so when you jump on things they move or sink or whatever. Normal weapons also obviously have physical characteristics. In addition, though, you get to have tools that let you pick things up, push things, throw things, and so on, which make it a lot richer for gameplay purposes."

When you ask anyone who has played the original Half-Life what was one of the more impressive aspects of the game, they'll probably say the artificial intelligence. Whether it was the impressive flanking strategies of the commandos at the end of the game (remember how they would flush you out by lobbing grenades?) or how the scientists were actually helpful during missions, Valve set the bar for intelligent NPCs and for Half-Life 2, they're taking it to the next level. One advancement is with a character's ability to track you. What this means is from now on they can go anywhere you can go. For example, in the original Half-Life, the scientists would follow you to a level transition and then say, "I'll wait for you here." In Half-Life 2, they'll stay with you. Another area is enemy pathfinding. Aside from the commandos and the bosses in Half-Life 1, all of the other enemies and monsters were pretty easy to kill. Some took longer to take down and eliminate, but it was easy to figure out behavior patterns and exploit them. In Half-Life 2, aliens and non-friendlies will be able to do wild double jumps and other cool techniques utilizing a new pathfinding system, making it incredibly hard to mow them down.

And just like the original Half-Life, Half-Life 2 is going to be mod friendly. Valve realizes that one of the main reasons why Half-Life 1 has lasted so many years is because of the support it has received from the mod community. "In terms of mods, we've learned a lot about both the engineering and community aspects of mods," explains Newell, "and Half-Life 2 will really benefit from the experiences we've had with Team Fortress Classic, Counter-Strike, and Day of Defeat. It will be a much more powerful, and much easier to use system than Half-Life 1." I don't know about you, but I can't wait to see what cool mods will emerge with Valve's new Source engine.

Sadly, my incredibly short time with Half-Life 2 eventually came to an end. After seeing the game in motion I can say with confidence that this incredible game is right on track and I can't wait to get my mitts on it. Mr. Newell has a brilliant team at Valve Software and they all recognize the obscene level of expectation this game has (which totally explains why they've been so hush-hush about everything).

"Without question, the original Half-Life forever changed the way people played first-person shooters."

- **system:** pc
- **developer:** valve software
- **publisher:** vivendi universal
- **available:** nov

preview

How can you not want this game after seeing these screenshots?

I actually like him when he's angry

The Hulk

words dave halverson

Hulk demonstrates what happens to film critics that trash his movie.

First you hear the thuds, like little earthquakes coming towards you. Next, the 12-inch-thick steel doors protecting you begin to twist and bend like taffy. And then, you're toast, slammed like a rag doll into the pavement so hard, your bones and the pavement below you fracture like safety glass. You've just had a visit from The Hulk—have a nice day. Minions of The Leader, Hulk's nemesis in the new movie-inspired game, experience this sensation on a regular basis, making controlling The Hulk one of this year's best guilty pleasures. More satisfying then a case of Snickers, he affects every inch of the game he touches; the character on screen truly emulating the mass and brutality of The Hulk.

Indeed, the best bits of the game are The Hulk levels (which occupy the majority of the game), orchestrated as give-and-take exchanges littered with re-spawning enemies. Hulk goes up against a mutant army that would make Spider-Man soil his tights, from tanks to bazooka toting freaks to the nastiest hounds from hell you've ever seen; he's got the moves too, and are they ever fun to dispense. Hulk can jump-hover and pounce, combo punch, hold and pound, throw, slam and gamma clap with the utmost bad intentions...and then he gets angry. Build up enough anger and he can pound the pavement like a wrecking ball falling from space, sending everything in the area flying like corn popping in the pan. You can stand and fight using the game's ample control scheme—in an effort to retain or gain gamma and anger—or keep moving, breaking through layer upon layer of fortress in your quest to reclaim the gamma orb (your curse) to keep The Leader from using it to build the ultimate KISS army. One thing I didn't expect from such a mainstream game was intense boss battles, but they're in here too. The first few are easy enough, but the last couple are a real bitch.

Along the way, certain circumstances will prevent you from going green, introducing simplistic stealth levels where Banner creeps his way past guards, those lovely doggies and scientists, for reasons of furthering the nicely integrated story. These segues are nicely handled but don't compare to the Hulkamania they support. Banner is pretty much a panty-waist as far as I can tell, and he says some pretty lame stuff along the way. I just want to know how his jeans stretch back into place.

Graphically, Radical really delivers—the game looks great. Although muted color schemes abound, they make great use of bright colors in skin tone and the effects, giving the game a nice plasticine gleam. What I'm really impressed with, however, is what they've done with the collision and destructible/useable environments. Making The Hulk feel like The Hulk, after all, was the single most important element here, and they've pretty much nailed it.

In a perfect world I'd have liked some outdoor levels, akin to the game's first, along with some user-controlled platforming (jumping is automatic) and bosses made difficult on their own rather than having to rely on re-spawning mid-level pests to aggravate the situation. Although the bosses are difficult, some just aren't that fun, requiring more do-overs than raw talent. Overall, The Hulk is a booming success; I hope the movie rakes in the cash, so I can rake in a sequel.

- **system:** ps2, gc, xbox
- **developer:** radical ent.
- **publisher:** vivendi universal
- **available:** now

B

"Hulk goes up against a mutant army that would make Spider-Man soil his tights"

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MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
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Violence

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PlayStation 2

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One kill at a time

Soldier of Fortune II Double Helix

words brady fiechter

Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix received focused attention for its graphic depiction of violence when it debuted on the PC a year ago. The debate over violence left for another day, there's no denying this durable first-person shooter goes to the extreme with its bloody action and gratuitous moments of death. The enemy gurgles profusely from well-placed shots, bodies collapse with exaggeration, knife slashes and weapon butts are certainly brutal, but it all still has a cartoon edge. If you don't like it, turn it off. And if you don't want to empty a round in a fallen body for kicks, don't. The game is still too crude in its presentation to be taken as a serious implication.

I focus on the violence because it's obviously present as an inane draw, a gimmick—not a way to impart more realism and emotional sophistication. In the end, it's just there, and the important thing here is the solid first-person experience the game holds. The PC version was well received, and for good reason: Soldier of Fortune II is intense, challenging, full of visual variety and nicely separated from everything else that is out there.

There is an effort to detail modern-day fiction within the incessant combat, shaking up the pacing and inspiring the many different locations for inherently more interest in what you're doing. The dialogue and situations are by-the-numbers video-game drivel, and the animation and modeling of the characters isn't so hot, but I can't deny that I was at least having fun with the progression. And I really like the wide array of settings, aiding the atmosphere where the power of the visuals needs a stronger engine.

The game does a good job of taking areas like the jungle and introducing fresh scenarios: in the bush of Columbia, militants crawl through grass and provide an even cooler feel to the appealing setting with their actions and placement. There are also many instances where you have to do more than just run, shoot and cover; platforming occasionally takes over, and the level design demands some exploration.

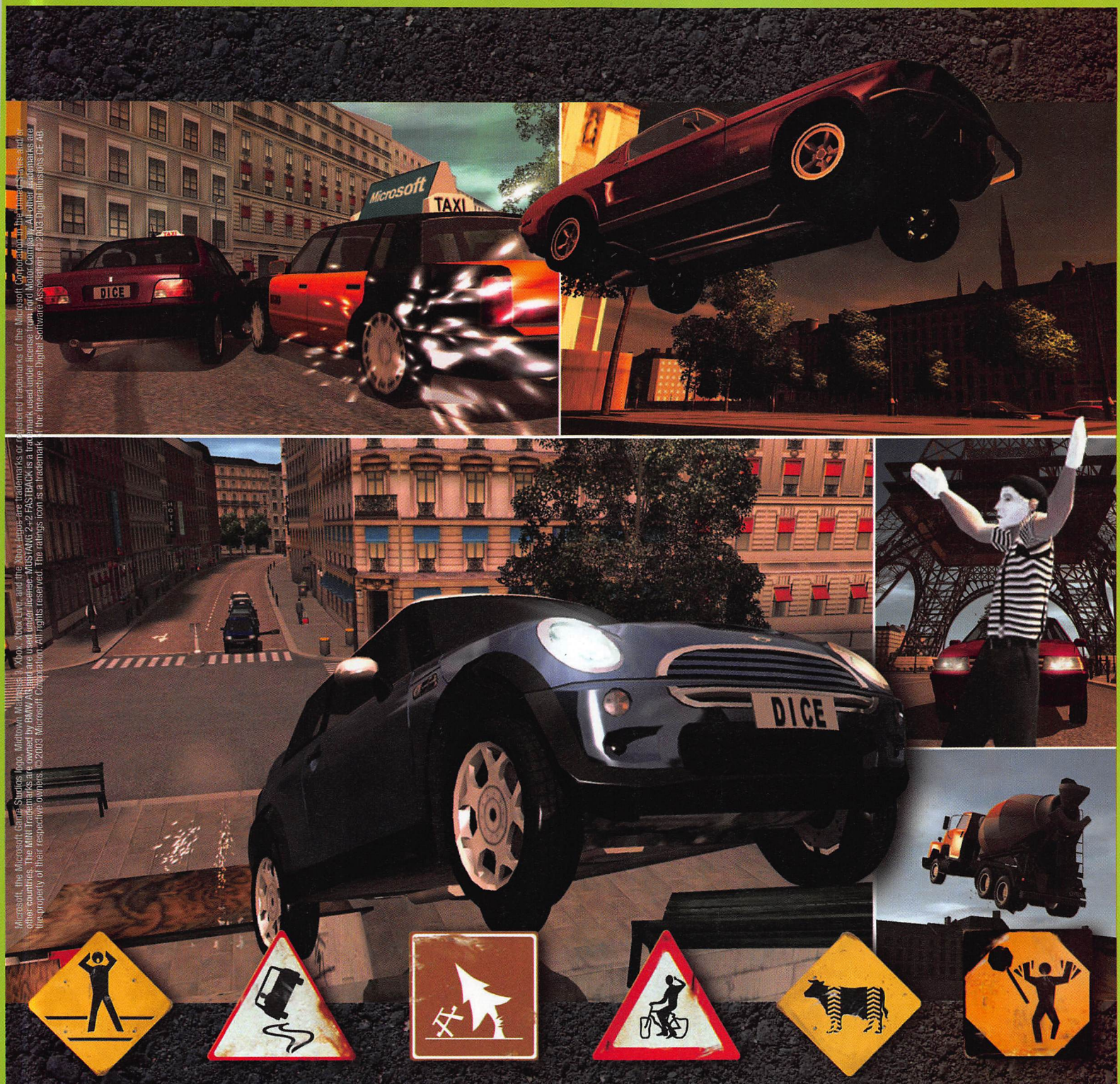
Soldier of Fortune II ultimately feels like it is a year old, and its technical limitations hurt the finer parts of the game. There's no reason it couldn't be a bit smoother and sound a bit better, but what's here will most definitely do for guys like me who can't get enough of the FPS.

The action is always right in your face, the way any good FPS should be

- **system:** xbox
- **developer:** raven software
- **publisher:** activision
- **available:** june

B-

"Soldier of Fortune II is intense, challenging, full of visual variety..."



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A wicked first-person shooter

Return to Castle WOLFENSTEIN Tides of War

words brady fiechter

"The setting is a big part of the game's appeal, dropping you in atmospheric castle tombs and creepy labs run by technicians of the black arts."

Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Tides of War offers little invention or the excitement of new surprises, sticking diligently to first-person shooting convention. You've experienced this brand of action many times before, zipping through passages and corridors, loading and reloading powerful guns to the interminable tune of kill, kill, kill. But what makes this game such a blast is the mastery of its familiar technique, the way every enemy charge ignites a rush of adrenaline. This is the most fun I've had with an FPS since Medal of Honor: Frontline.

The setting is a big part of the game's appeal, dropping you in atmospheric castle tombs and creepy labs run by technicians of the black arts. There's an innocent pulp lightness despite the shadowy construct, giving the game a commanding balance of reality and stylistic fantasy. When nondescript hero B.J. Blazkowicz clears one finely constructed area and marches to another, it all feels conceivably linked and immersively flowing. Every step is as visually satisfying as it is viscerally intense.

The potentially engaging plot inevitably becomes a shallow service to the rich looks, but there is enough development to enhance the mood and lend more purpose to the running and gunning. The ties to a plausible reality give the game a unique spin, and it's always fun stumbling on to some new area that looks torn directly out of an old German propaganda comic.

There's no denying the rush of a flame-thrower bake session or the explosive destruction of a well-placed rocket, but Wolfenstein is not concerned with offering you hordes of ridiculous weaponry for fleeting flash value. The game's grip is tightened by how well you use what crude weapons you do find, constantly throwing out tough scenarios that are skillfully structured and visually commanding. Even when the human and monster resistance isn't necessarily that smart, it's how they move, where they move, that matters most, and the game does a superb job of scripting exciting moments that build throughout the campaign. And perhaps most easily overlooked is the pacing and almost perfect feel of play that renders the straightforward nature of Wolfenstein moot. Subtle but important touches, like keen use of sound and dialogue, take the experience to even higher ground.

With the strength of its online component, Wolfenstein fights valiantly for the best-of-system spot. Strategy boldly joins the action, driven by four deep character classes that are balanced to proper effect; being a medic may not sound like a devilishly good time, but you'd be surprised at how much fun it can be to take on the necessity of a healing presence. Like the single-player experience, the online play isn't dramatically new, but that's the last thing to be concerned with when there's so much to like.

- **system:** xbox
- **developer:** id/nerve software
- **publisher:** activision
- **available:** now

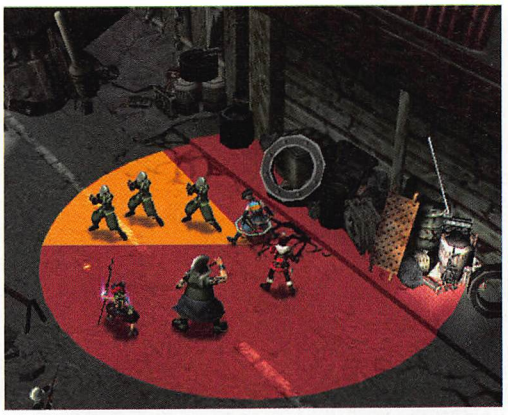
B+

From the enemies to the levels to the sound, everything is top-notch design

It's a brave new world

Arc The Lad Twilight of Spirits

words chris hoffman



Having played more Arc the Lad Collection than any sane person should, I thought I'd be stepping into thoroughly familiar territory in Arc the Lad: Twilight of the Spirits. However, I discovered this wasn't the case. The Arc universe has undergone significant upheaval since I last set foot there, and the result is a mixed bag.

Set a millennium or so after the events in Arc III, the planet is now divided between humankind and sentient, intelligent monsters called Deimos. This duality between worlds sets up a unique presentation, as there are two main characters with conflicting viewpoints, and the story alternates between each. It's a slick method of storytelling that pays off for a while, but ultimately doesn't reach its full potential. Some tantalizing plot threads are never satisfactorily resolved, and clichéd characters abound. A notable exception is Bebedora, one of the coolest characters ever in an RPG.

The redesign for Arc's trademark strategic battles, meanwhile, is a breath of fresh air. Gone is the typical grid-based system of most strategic RPGs, replaced with 360 degrees of movement. In some ways, so much freedom makes the battles less tactical, but it allows for many more possibilities, adding newfound fun and creativity to a somewhat tired convention.

Strangely, Twilight never really capitalizes on being part of the Arc series. Connections to previous games are vague throughout most of the journey, and due to translation differences between this and Arc Collection, the continuity is even harder to follow. What's more, the game lacks many features of Arc II or Arc III. There are no Hunter jobs to accept, wanted monsters to hunt down or enemies to capture in cards.

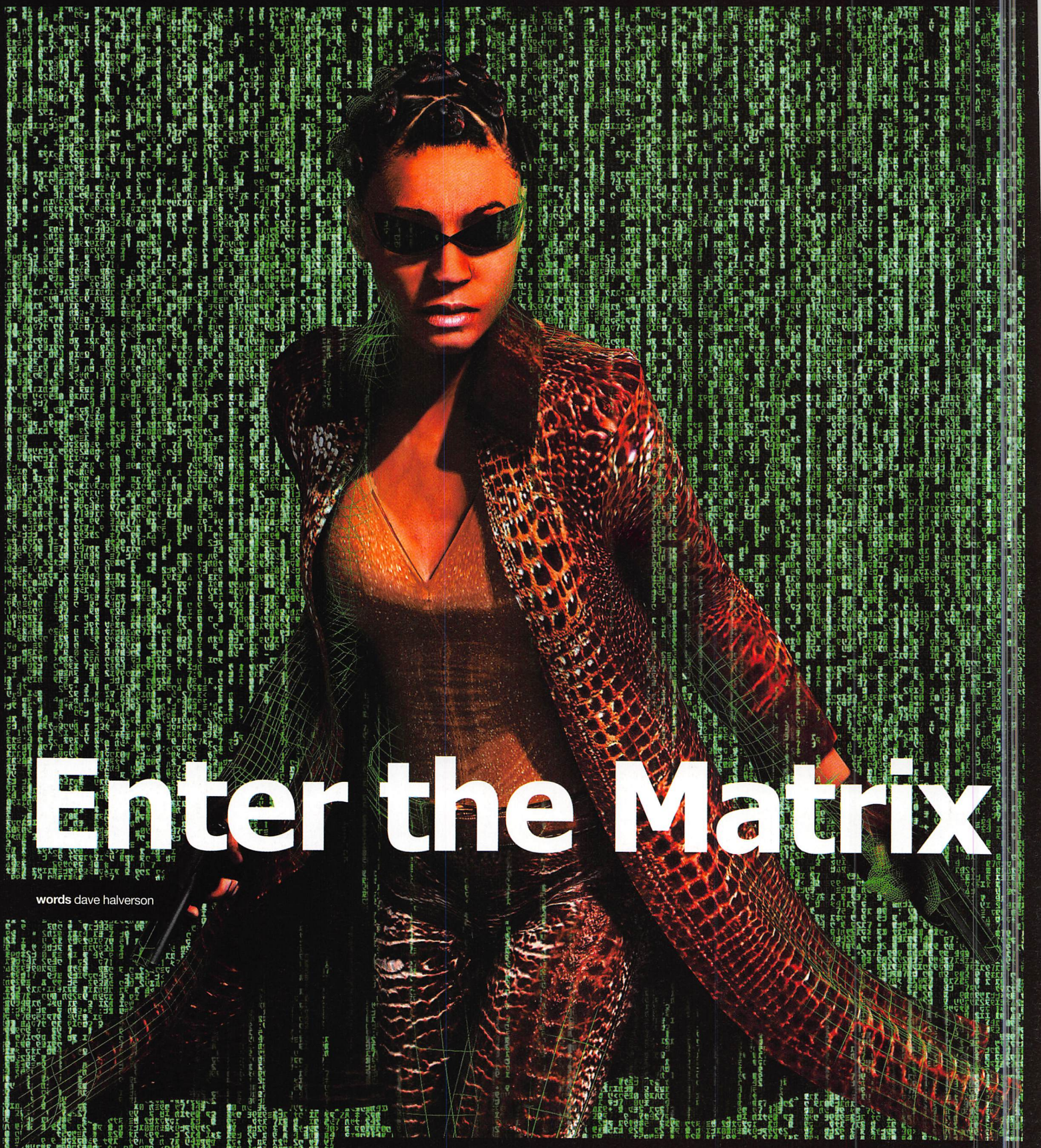
While I did enjoy playing the game, I never got the big payoff I was hoping for. Despite the fun combat, decent visuals and eclectic but strangely catchy soundtrack, the lack of depth and unfulfilling story left me lukewarm and yearning for another adventure with Arc, Elc or Alec. Twilight of the Spirits is a solid RPG, nothing less, but nothing more.

- **system:** ps2
- **developer:** cattle call
- **publisher:** sony
- **available:** june

B-

"The Arc universe has undergone significant upheaval since I last set foot there, and the result is a mixed bag."

Darc (in the left pic) and Kharg (on the right) are twin brothers that spend the game wanting to kill each other.



Enter the Matrix

words dave halverson

"By the time you hit the sewers you should be feeling the back of your neck for a giant input jack"

Ah, The Matrix; a paradoxical universe for anti-geeks the world over. It's Star Wars for cool people; a universe surrounded by all things Zen. As much as I love the first two films, going into the game review, I couldn't help but question the Wachowskis' decision to commission Shiny to do the game and then choose to write and direct it themselves. Shiny are, after all, mad scientists of technology and crazy cool design (a match made in Zion for the likes of the franchise), so why not let them run with the imaginary ball? When the smoke cleared, however, I must admit, they've done their mega-franchise proud and raised the proverbial bar on the category.

The game feels directed but never heavy-handed. Climbing down from a catwalk to pick up the flash light you just dislodged from your latest victim's hand, as you make your way back to the ladder, you hear they've discovered you from above, followed by a friendly grenade toss in your direction. Ascending to view the kill (which you hopefully averted), you commence laying the smack down, Matrix-style, leaving the lot of them cheek-deep in the foul sludge. The game flow is never interrupted yet wonderfully scripted, and so it goes.

The Wachowskis may have directed it, but certain Shiny trademarks bubble to the surface like tub farts. Coming off a five-year PC bender, the game requires you attain oneness with its controls before its virtues can be hacked, and this one is all over the pad. Playing on Xbox, I got to know my Controller S so well we're driving to Vegas after the issue closes. Between the actions of the main cluster, strafing and target-locking on the right trigger, focusing on the left, and shooting via the demonically placed black button, it takes a while to actually dial in all of your focus moves, but once its nuances take hold, the game's finely tuned underbelly begins to emerge. Perhaps by the time the sequel hits, we'll be able to jack into Shiny for a quick control schematic download, Trinity-style. Of the three pads, the GameCube controller was the best acclaimed to the action. The game is also subtly different depending on whether you play as Ghost or Niobe in correlation with their character's screen personas—Niobe being a skilled pilot and Ghost a weapons expert. It's also the only way to see all of the game's filmed sequences, which defy anything ever placed in a game. Essentially there is a real Wachowski Bros. film in here, which in and of itself is a revelation in the gaming world. I prefer playing as Niobe, but Ghost gets to hang out the window of the Camaro to pick off police cars and has way more fun at the airport. Regardless, the two characters vary more than enough to warrant two passes.

Graphically the game is a mixed bag. Certain effects, like fire, are archaic; the ancillary models are only adequate, and at times the detail is wanting. The characters tend to jitter, too, when placed in certain areas, but these are minor flaws in the grand scheme of things. The tradeoff for these minor distractions far outweigh their presence. The environments, no matter how immense—and they get cavernous—never dip below 60, and the animation throughout borders on superb. Coupled with the almost incalculable number of Focus moves—easily the most nuanced single in-game element ever— the game begins to take on a life of its own that is somewhat personalized the more you play. By the time you hit the sewers you should be feeling the back of your neck for a giant input jack. Still more refinement: the backgrounds actually disintegrate as you're fired upon, the dynamic music makes the hair on the back of your neck stand on end and the vehicular sequences are handled very well—never too long or short—and are balanced as to enhance the experience, not remove you from it.

All is not perfect in Enter The Matrix, but for its few flaws, the game delivers what it is meant to: a very convincing experience inside The Matrix that looks, smells, and feels like…The Matrix. Shiny seem less concerned these days with their usual perfecting to a fault and more with immersion and fun. Whether this is the byproduct of such a massive license or the realization that people just want more than two Shiny games a decade, it bodes well for future endeavors, in or out of The Matrix. Of course, I still have candles burning for both Jim and Wex.

- **system:** ps2, gc, xb, pc
- **developer:** shiny ent.
- **publisher:** atari
- **available:** now

B+

Ghost demonstrates what every LA commuter wishes he or she could do to every bonehead half in the lane on a cell phone. "Get more?" Yeah, get this...ka-pow!

reviews

game of the month

016

P.N. 03

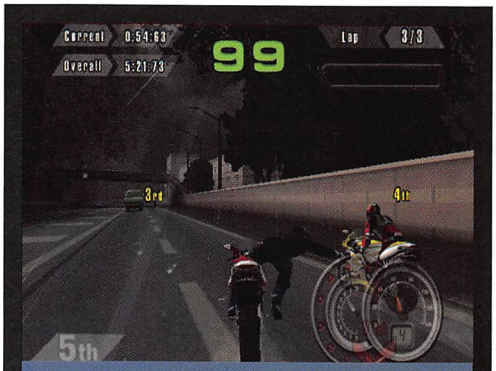
Put to a vote, Vanessa just edged out the Brute Force team, though both games deserve the honor in their respective categories.

The Incredible Hulk

Hulk doesn't translate as well onto the GBA as he does console, but Pocket Studios make a valiant effort of it. For starters, they get the iso-controls right (up goes up, etc., thus avoiding having the d-pad imprinted into your thumb for six weeks) and the graphics are very nicely detailed for the small screen. Hulk goes gamma, busts through walls, can lift and throw just about anything, and regenerates like on console, but a slight lag in the jump is bothersome and regenerating is a little slow for the gameplay. The comic book-style cinemas are cool though and the music's on the money, if not a tad repetitive. I'd say it's worth the green. *–Dave Halverson*

- **system:** gba
- **developer:** pocket studios
- **publisher:** vivendi universal
- **available:** now

C+



Speed Kings

Speed Kings is a frenetic motorcycle racer that drops you into busy, obstacle-infested streets that are meant to eat you alive no matter how good your skills. The idea is to speed as close to the edge of insanity as possible, building a power band and points system the more fancy your boasting—pop wheelies, surf the seat, intentionally cause near-miss collisions, even throw your bike down to skid under traffic and hazards. The bikes handle just as you would want them to within the bounds of the hyper-reality mechanics. Garish yet technically strong, the look fits the play style—thin yet fun. *–Brady Fiechter*

- **system:** xbox
- **developer:** climax
- **publisher:** acclaim
- **available:** now

C+

Brute Force

Brute Force is one of those games you can really sink your teeth into, where there's no such thing as playing a casual game. Once you dive into it, there's no stopping, save to pee and grab refills. The attention to detail—from the enemy AI and verbal exchanges to visual cues like dust, ash and fog (I even found physics on old tires rolling off of exploded debris)—is impeccable, and the team play aspects, especially in a one-player campaign, equal maximum immersion. After a few missions I was thinking how the game could benefit from more stealth elements—like wall-creeping and a few more animations on the characters to better synch with the environments—but given the FPS feel of the control, I can see why they've kept it simple. Brute Force is really an amalgam of action and tactical shooting, and the more I play, the more I like the way it's balanced. Once Flint was commissioned, I became totally hooked—she's easily the most useful all-around character (not bad for a synthetic), and sniping is just so satisfying. Another surprise is the music, especially in 5.1 surround. They do a big-time Predator number in the jungle that's totally cool. Great game. *–Dave Halverson*

- **system:** xbox
- **developer:** digital anvil
- **publisher:** microsoft game studios
- **available:** now

A-

Sonic Advance DX Director's Cut

Due to DX's less-than-thorough makeover, what seemed a great idea has become a missed opportunity. While DX is polished somewhat, the ancillary models remain in a sad state, the pop-up is rampant, the special effects dated, and the collision detection, sadly, is still far from acceptable. What was once a testament to the Dreamcast's power now stands as a graphically inferior GameCube game. Plagued by the same problems as the original—only three years later, in a market that evolves every six months—the game left me blue. The charm of certain aspects of this game will always shine brightly and the added elements will surely please Segaphiles looking for a tribute to the juggernaut DC, but we must now look to Sonic Heroes to continue the heritage. *–Dave Halverson*

- **system:** gamecube
- **developer:** sonic team
- **publisher:** sega
- **available:** now

C

Ape Escape 2

Ape Escape 2 seemed cooler a year ago when it hit Japan. While the game is still good fun, its kid-friendly finish and slightly dated graphics make less of an impact than it might have if released a year ago. While it plays similar to the 1.4-million-selling PS original—Hikaru must snag mad monkeys for the professor, after he accidentally gives them Peak-Point Helmets instead of monkey pants—it doesn't contain as diabolical an edge, coming off more pastel, and cuter than I remember. It's giggly and obviously aimed at kids, which isn't such a bad thing; there aren't as many games for kids these days and Ape Escape 2 is a tight, nicely designed, very fun game. One thing that has retained its appeal are the gadgets, which seem to never stop coming, from the familiar RC car to flying gizmos, underwater gear, and all manner of ape-stopping apparatuses. Sony has also packed quite a bit of platforming and some cool timing stints in here, covering some 20 massive levels. And when you get tired of chasing cheeky monkeys, the lab is filled with things to do, like win prizes and play mini-games. It's a happy Japanese game (i.e. endangered species); have a look. *–Dave Halverson*

• **system:** ps2 • **developer:** scei • **publisher:** ubi soft • **available:** now

B-

K-1 World Grand Prix

You'd think that a game that's basically about kicking people in the head would be filled with excitement, but I didn't find that to be the case with K-1 World Grand Prix. The experience comes across as rather dry, and while I don't need sizzle when I have steak, the boxing-like gameplay is also pretty drab. I give KCEO credit for quality character models, some nice gameplay modes and a hint of strategy, but it isn't enough. If real-life fighters like Mike Bernardo and Jorgen Kruth mean something to you, however, your experience may improve accordingly. *–Chris Hoffman*

• **system:** ps2 • **developer:** kceo • **publisher:** konami • **available:** now

C

Rally Championship

For a sport with basically no TV audience in America, there is a good amount of rally games to choose from out there. The problem is, they're all on other systems, which gives Rally Championship something of an edge, especially as V-Rally 3 and Colin McRae have both been cancelled for the Gamecube. And as a rally game, Rally Championship ticks off the right boxes: real-world cars, real-time damage simulation, co-driver interaction, and nice dusty racing action. However, it fails to add up to a truly compelling racer, lacking the graphical polish, deeply sorted phyisics and verisimilitude of McRae. Rally Championship's control is actually pretty good, but the game can only lurk in the shadow cast by McRae on Xbox and PS2. *–Michael Hobbs*

• **system:** gc • **developer:** encore • **publisher:** conspiracy entertainment • **available:** july

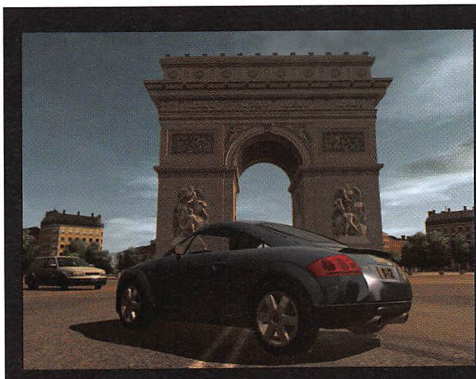
C+

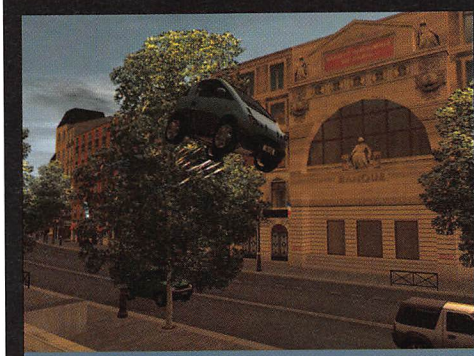
Freestyle Metal X

Taking motocross into familiar Tony Hawk territory, minus inherent flaws like time limits, spelling words and smallish environments, FMX is as fresh as newly picked scab. Provided you survive the game's mega-training, it's into the world you go to pounce rivals and ride like a banshee. Taking cues from cuties in bikinis, you find yourself alone and un-timed to complete an array of challenges (chasing down mad cows is always fun) in areas that seem to go on forever. The animation is sweet, depth of faces and places deep like Def Poetry, the play mechanics are superb and the controls are nicely laid. The ancillary models could be better and there's a lack of camera angles, but minor itches aside, FMX stands alone in the freestyle MX category. *–Dave Halverson*

• **system:** ps2, xbox, gc • **publisher:** midway
• **developer:** midway • **available:** now

B





Midtown Madness 3

In the adrenaline-charged Midtown Madness 3, when you're not trashing the gorgeously rendered streets of Paris and Washington, D.C. in your cab, you might be delivering a pizza, protecting an important package, playing the part of a secret agent. Nearly everything in your way can be smashed or bowled over, which becomes almost illegal fun when your bug is replaced by a city bus. A lot of missions are timed-based or throw in the added competition of racers or pursuers, so a skillful driving touch through the dense streets is also part of the fun. When you do get a little too close to the edge, the crashes, both involving you and going on around you, are exaggerated and energetically displayed as the camera pulls back to capture the chaos. *–Brady Fiechter*

• **system:** xbox • **publisher:** microsoft
• **developer:** digital illusions • **available:** now

B+

Do you believe in

Magic: The Gathering

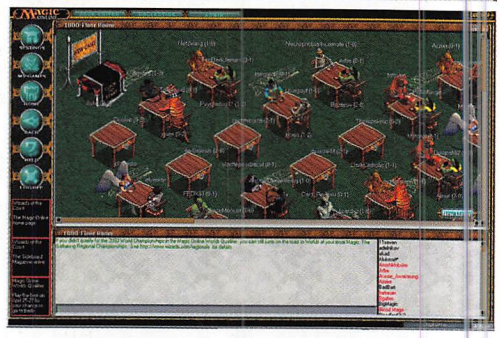
words brady fiechter

For the disciples of Magic: The Gathering, it's not just a game, it's a religion—to command these elegant cards is to discover the power of a god. Its over seven million devout followers, living in 52 countries, hold several billion cards translated across nine languages between them. For the truly devoted, tournaments are held annually, with over 100,000 sanctioned events rewarding as much as $3,000,000 in cash. There's even a Magic: The Gathering Junior Super Series of tournaments that offer players under 16 the chance at scholarships. Created in 1993, Magic the Gathering is in the midst of celebrating its storied 10th-year anniversary. So dominating is this original game idea that creators Wizards of the Coast has a distinct patent on certain play mechanics of trading card games. Over 6,000 original cards have been produced since Magic's inception—their rich fantasy art is a big part of the draw—and to celebrate their 10 years of feeding the magic, Wizards of the Coast is preparing all sorts of cool things to appease their fans. Perhaps the most exciting news is the introduction of a new Magic: The Gathering core card set in July, which will contain an array of classics along with the new; a starter set will also be available for those unfamiliar with this incredibly complex world. At this summer's GenCon, the largest game fair in the world, Wizards of the Coast will continue with the festivities by hosting a fan celebrating event. Also in the works is the biggest global Magic event to date, where a network of over 2,000 official tournaments will host the competitions simultaneously.

The collectibility of Magic cards has always been part of the appeal, but ultimately it's the involving foundation of the play mechanics that infects the players. The idea is to drain your opponent's score from 20 to 0, using creatures, artifacts and spells in conjunction with a bevy of more general cards that possess different degrees of power and technique. The rules may sound basic, but once you dive in, the water is oh so deep. Translating all this admirably to the computer screen is Magic: The Gathering Online, which is now close to receiving a version 2.0 update, recently shown at E3. New card sets have also been introduced, such as the Scourge and Legion decks, but the biggest news is the simplification of the interface, which will favor the new user who might have been too intimidated by the rules set. Something called a Red Zone is also being worked into the basic structure, which bars anyone under an 1800 rating from entering the room. One of the caveats that's always been in place is the distinct separation between the masters and the neophytes, but version 2.0 also deals with this by offering matchmaking tools that specifies certain rules before entering the game. Don't want to deal with a certain card being placed in the deck? Then remove it from the start. If you haven't been introduced to the Magic: the Gathering universe, now's as good a time as ever.

- **system:** pc
- **developer:** wotc
- **publisher:** wotc
- **available:** ongoing

preview



Talk about an out-of-body experience...be all that you can be, be it ogre, minotaur or otherwise

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Creature — Minion Legend
When Phage the Untouchable comes into play, if you didn't play it from your hand, you lose the game.
Whenever Phage deals combat damage to a creature, destroy that creature. It can't be regenerated.
Whenever Phage deals combat damage to a player, that player loses the game.
Illus. Ron Spears
4/4
JessR's Cards for Trade (21656)
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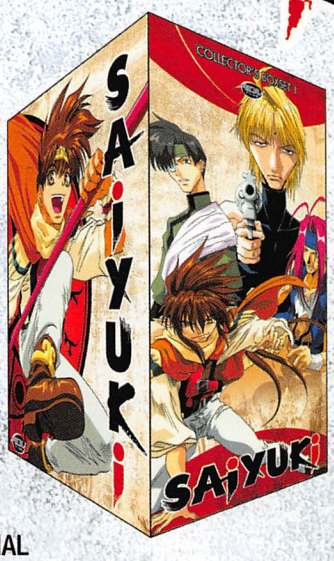

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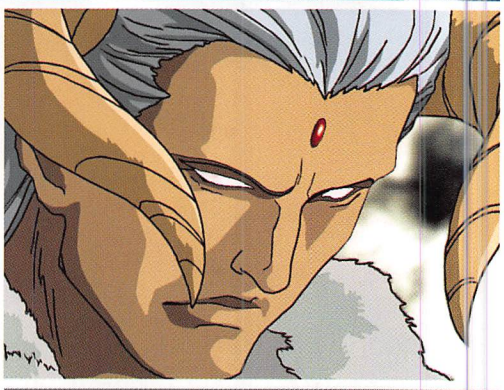
Queen of the Damned

Spectral Force

Swords vs. Sorcery

words dave halverson



The Demon God Janus as we come to know him in episode 1... just before he gets skewered by Chiffon

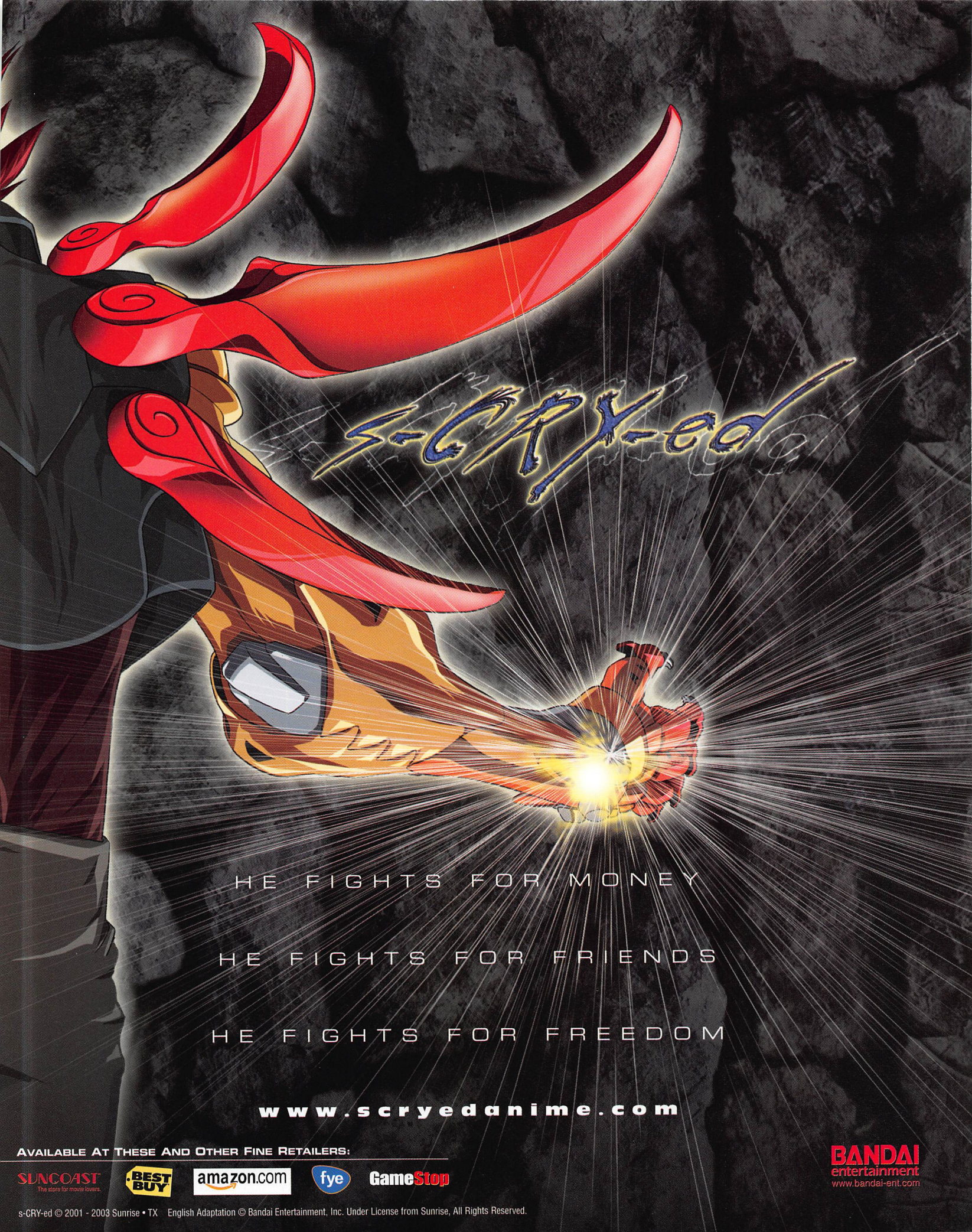
You'd think the producers of Spectral Force had found Middle Earth and put their own unique stamp on it, but they're just following the path laid by the two import PS games from Idea Factory. In a world called Neverland, oddly enough, demons, humans and the gods lived in peace until a great war broke out in which the demons were victorious. Lord Janus ruled with an iron fist for generations and had two daughters; we join the story as his youngest, Hiro, a demon/human hybrid, sets out to become a warrior, aided by three mercenaries hired to protect her: Sato, Zackiphon and Chick (who is voiced by the same actor as Orphen's pal, Majic, and looks a lot like him as well). As Hiro and her men begin their pilgrimage of demon plundering, a sword fashioned by the gods with the express purpose of slaying the demon king is discovered by the humans, and Hiro's father and sister are slain. Sensing trouble, she arrives back at the palace just in time to witness her sister's spirit make for the afterlife, guiding Janus and the sword into the heavens so that the sword can never again strike down a reigning demon... Left with a small army and a massive human contingent breathing down her neck, the young princess must rise above, form new alliances and become a valiant queen, which shouldn't be all that difficult seeing how she's got a goblin arm that looks like a present from Skeletor and, as fate would have it, a demon brother that seems lifted from so many Wolfteam games.

The most interesting aspect of Spectral Force, aside from the RPG-ish rhetoric I've just spewed, is that it's not only based on a video game, it half looks like one. The CG employed looks lifted directly from console. Fused with the flat 2D cell animation, the show has an almost diorama look to it akin to Atlus' PlayStation epic Thousand Arms. Neither technique employs modern-day polish or technology, giving the whole production a sort of hand-made feel. I'm not sure why, but I was quite drawn to it; must be the old retro gamer in me bubbling to the surface... Spectral Force has captured my interest. I look forward to future volumes.

"...it's not only based on a video game, it half looks like one."

- **studio:** adv films
- **rating:** 13 & up
- **running time:** 50 min
- **available:** now

B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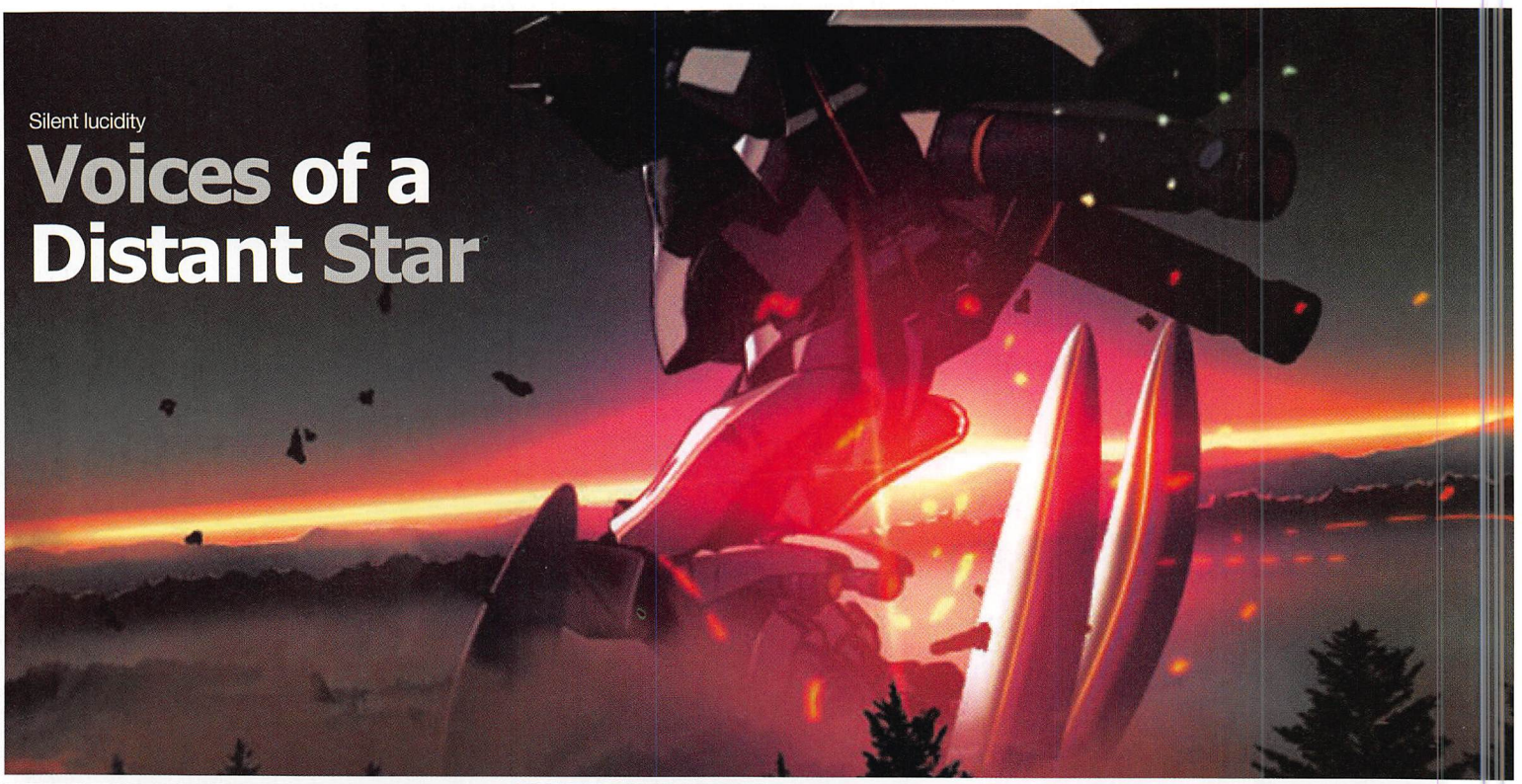
Silent lucidity

Voices of a Distant Star

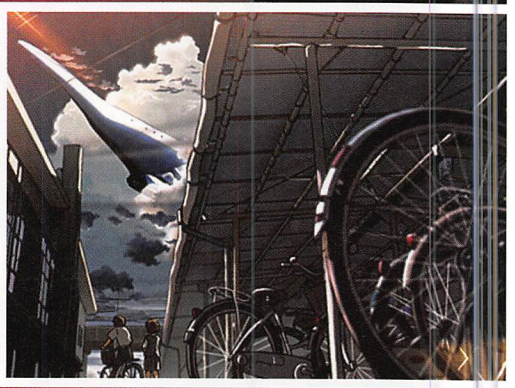


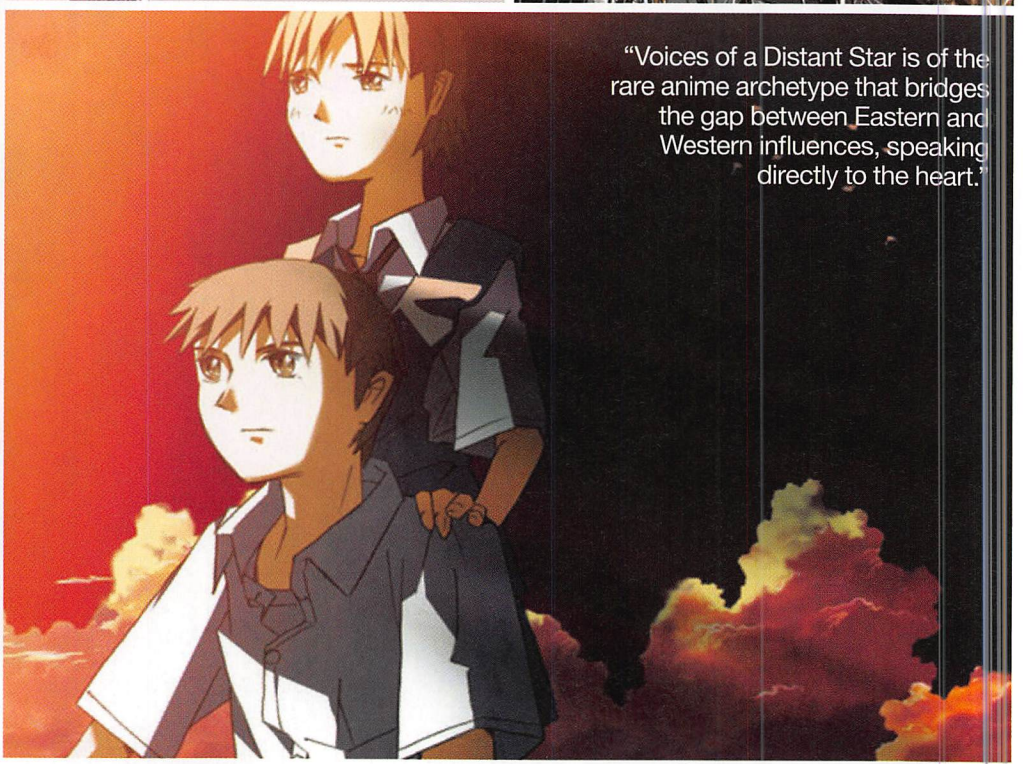
words dave halverson

Voices of a Distant Star creator Makato Shinkai is a genius, creating this work nearly single-handedly; he's like Miyazaki incarnate. *Voices of a Distant Star* is of the rare anime archetype that bridges the gap between Eastern and Western influences, speaking directly to the heart. Beyond the indelible visual impression it will leave in your mind, its message of love and the miracle of the universe resonates as if you'd taken in a feature-length drama, all in the span of 30 minutes. When a war a half-century removed, against an alien menace called Tarsians, separates Mikako and the one person on Earth she loves, Noboru, 20th century email becomes their only link. As she broaches Mars, to Jupiter, on to Pluto, eventually piercing our solar system, her transmissions go from taking months to years to reach him as Noboru grows older—Mikako suspended by time, a perpetual 15. The story lives in this connection by their narrative—one long letter home culminating in a spiritual awakening that bends time and space, reaching into the heart of creation and our connection with the universe. Quite possibly the most beautifully colored animation I have ever seen, the mixture of traditional animation and 3D imagery is exquisite, and the quality and crispness of the transfer deliver it in pristine condition. Even if you've never bought an anime in your life, heck, if you've never bought animation, find this DVD and invest a half an hour in your state of mind. The extras, including Shinkai's "She and Her Cat," along with interviews and a Director's Cut, are worth the price of the disc alone.

- **studio:** adv films
- **rating:** 13 & up
- **running time:** 30 min
- **available:** now

A





"Voices of a Distant Star is of the rare anime archetype that bridges the gap between Eastern and Western influences, speaking directly to the heart."

A rare moment prior to Mikako and Noboru's longest of goodbyes

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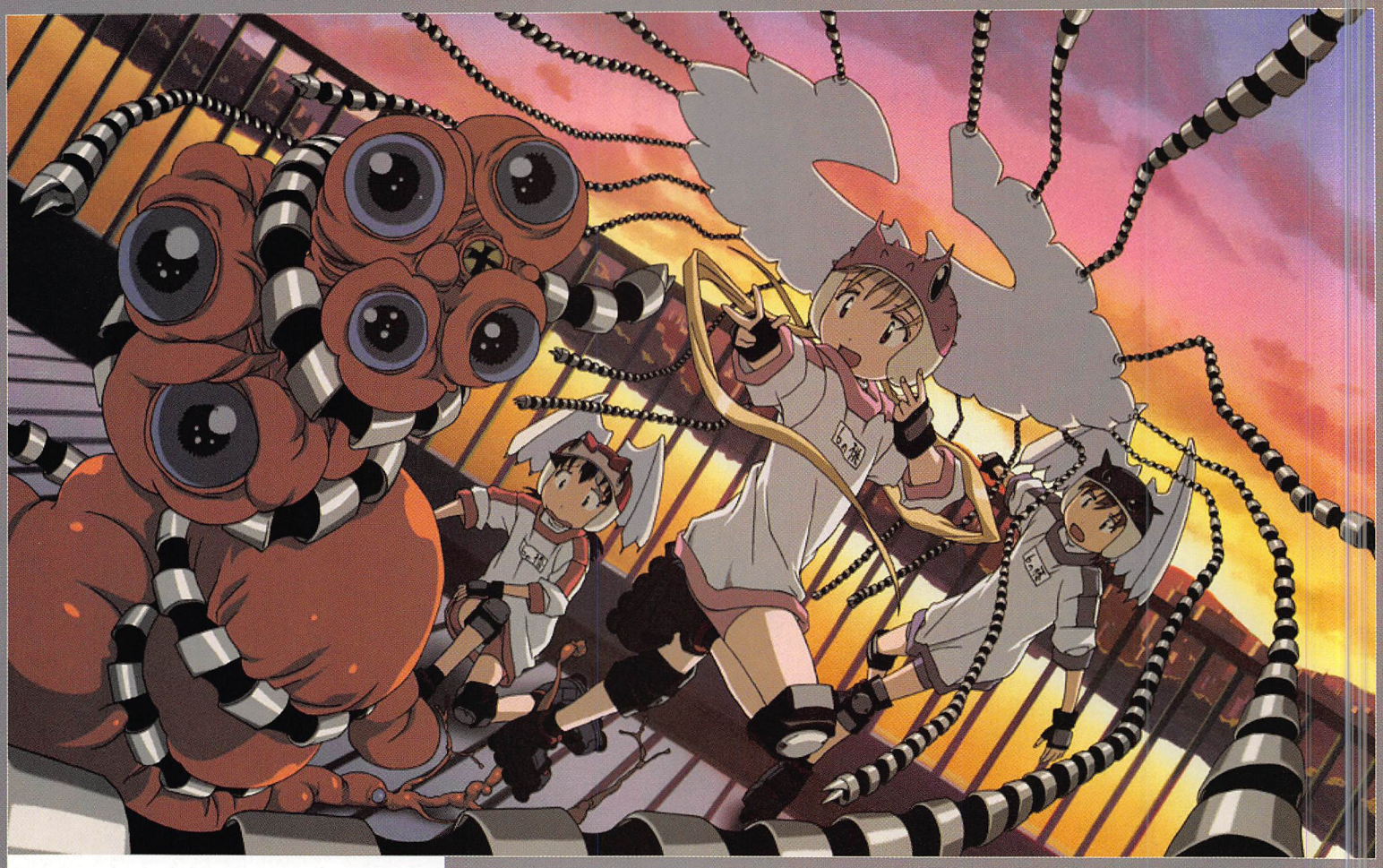


Nice hat!

Alien Nine

words dave halverson

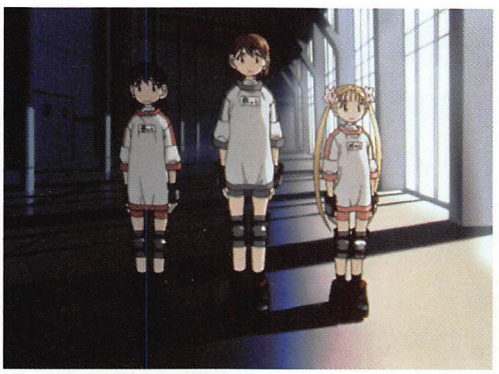
Nothing like a coming of age story with a symbiotic alien affixed to your head. You think you know weird? I thought I did, until the first time Yuri slipped a Borg onto her head. From the creators of *Excel Saga* and the screenwriters of *Cowboy BeBop* and *Bubblegum Crisis*, in *Alien Nine*, alien invasions are as much a part of the curriculum as homeroom. ETs come in all shapes and sizes—and come often—and are of course filled with thick, green gunk, just waiting to be popped like shaken soda cans. Three girls are elected each semester by their respective classmates to catch and store the invading hordes for study, armed only with rollerblades and a symbiotic alien attached to their head, like fat little frogs with angel wings able to sprout steel tentacles, as well as think and reason for themselves. Kumi and Kusumi accept their posts (and newfound partners) willingly—it's a great way to get out of class and gain popularity after all—but poor Yuri is scared to death. She cries like a wet baby and struggles with her newfound inner demons throughout most of the four episodes: before, during and sometimes after each battle. It's as if the invaders know she's scared too; she always seems to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

In Japan, the show likely served as a compelling way to teach kids about accepting responsibility. Not that it's overly juvenile; it's so surreal it doesn't have the time to be—but given the ending, I'm really not sure what to think. All I wanted to do in sixth grade was feel up girls though, so who am I to judge?

Animation-wise, *Alien Nine* is a quality ride from start to finish, the voice acting is totally on the money, and the character designs are refreshingly reverse peculiar; rather than big eyes and small features, the girls have massive ears and no noses, like a Peanuts cartoon gone horribly wrong. If you like it weird, you're gonna like this one a lot.

- **studio:** central park media
- **running time:** 100 min
- **rating:** 13 & up
- **available:** now

B+

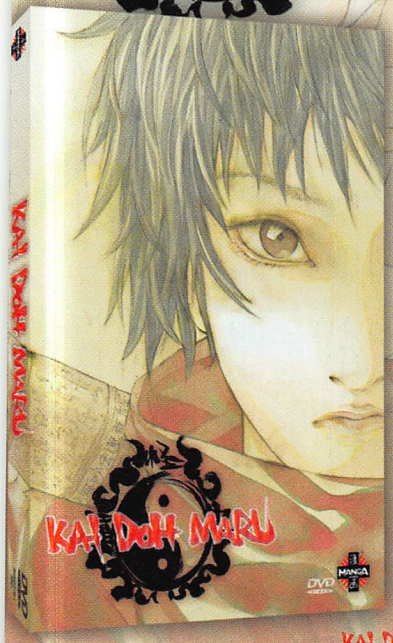


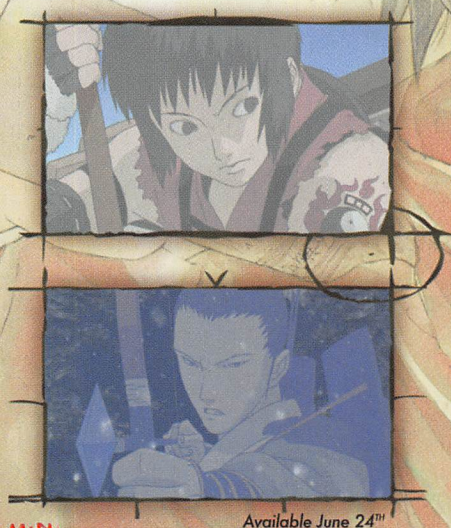
"You think you know weird? I thought I did, until the first time Yuri slipped a Borg onto her head."

"STUNNING AND BEAUTIFUL... ASTONISHING FROM START TO FINISH" - ANIME INSIDER

FROM THE CREATORS OF "BLOOD THE LAST VAMPIRE"

KAI DOH MARU





Available June 24TH

KAI DOH MARU

DIRECTOR: KANJI WAKABAYASHI EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: RYUZO SHIRAKAWA, MITSUHISA ISHIKAWA ORIGINAL CREATOR: PRODUCTION I.G
PRODUCTION: ANIPLEX INC. PRODUCER: KATSUJI MORISHITA CHARACTER DESIGN: SHO-U TAJIMA SCRIPT: NOBUTOSHI TERADO
ANIMATION DIRECTOR: KYOUJI ASANO COLOR DESIGN: NAGISA ABE 3D DIRECTOR: MAKOTO ENDOH 2D WORKS: TSUKASA KAKIZAKAI
FILMING: NATSUKO MORI SOUND DIRECTOR: KEIICHI MOMOSE MUSICAL SCORE: YOSHIHIRO IKE TITLE MUSIC: YUTAKA FUKUOKA
ANIMATION PRODUCTION: PRODUCTION I.G

DVD

Clouds leave no trace in the sky, so fragile, just like my being

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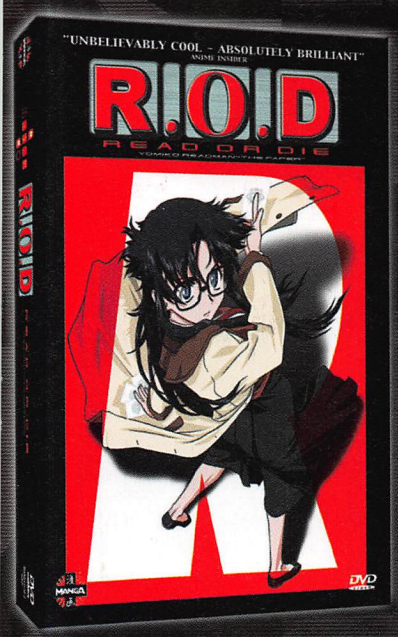

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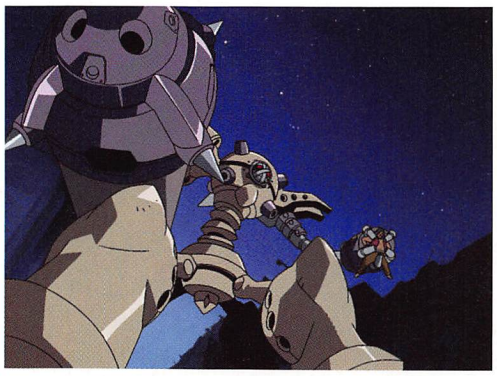
words dave halverson



Bandai births new series like rabbits on fertility drugs in a Viagra lab, the latest being *s-Cry-ed*, a classic sci-fi action drama with a McTwist—it's set 22 years after an earthquake ravaged an island off Japan, spawning a peculiar mutation. One percent of the children that survived the "great uprising" inherited the ability to decompose and reconstruct materials using spiritual power. These "Alters" vary in power and ability, from being able to liquefy objects to spawning powerful alter egos or personal mechanized war machines. Save it to say, now grown up, they pose quite a threat. Since the only way to deal with an Alter is with another Alter, an organization was formed called HOLD (and an organization within it called HOLY) to investigate native Alter crimes outside the barrier—arrest and punish them, giving them the option of a stiff sentence or pledging their allegiance to HOLY. Divided by a huge wall separating the safety of the modern metropolis from the wastelands known as the Lost Ground (calling Judge Dredd) where the native Alters live amongst a chaotic non-conformist society, the battle lines are drawn for turf wars on a biblical scale.

Remind you of anything? I can't help but draw parallels between this and X-Men—HOLY as Professor Xavier's posse and the native Alters as Magneto's rebels. Now let's set the table for the drama. Someone must have Aaron Spelling on speed dial because this one seeps classic Must See TV. On the native side of the equation we have Kazuma, an Alter for hire protecting the good people of the Lost Ground from bad Alters out to hurt or control them; he's a rebel with a cause who returns from each fray to his grandpappy and young sister (or so it would appear) with money for food and medicine. On the other side of the equation is Ryuho, HOLY's most powerful soldier, an omni-powerful Alter whom seven years prior watched his mother (and dog) die by the hand of a lightning Alter and was changed forever. When HOLY gets wind of Kazuma's antics and the powerful ability he possesses, they spare no expense going after him hard, lead by, unsurprisingly, Ryuho. Between the two, of course, a perky female must be wedged; enter Mimori, daughter of a big-wig HOLY investor and childhood friend of Ryuho (before he saw his mother killed and became a sausage).

Within the confines of this structure, you'll find an array of Alter users, a corrupt government, side stories galore, and battles so wicked they make Wild Arms look like pop guns...and this is only volume 1. An eclectic blend of American comic-book style and dramatic influences, infused with Japanese character designs, flamboyancy and technique, *s-Cry-ed* is yet another series to delight in from Bandai. Now would someone please change the paper in their cage?

- **studio:** bandai entertainment
- **rating:** 13 & up
- **running time:** 125 min
- **available:** now

B

"Within the confines of this structure, you'll find an array of Alter users, a corrupt government, side stories galore, and battles so wicked they make Wild Arms look like pop guns..."

They needed a new hero...
So they built
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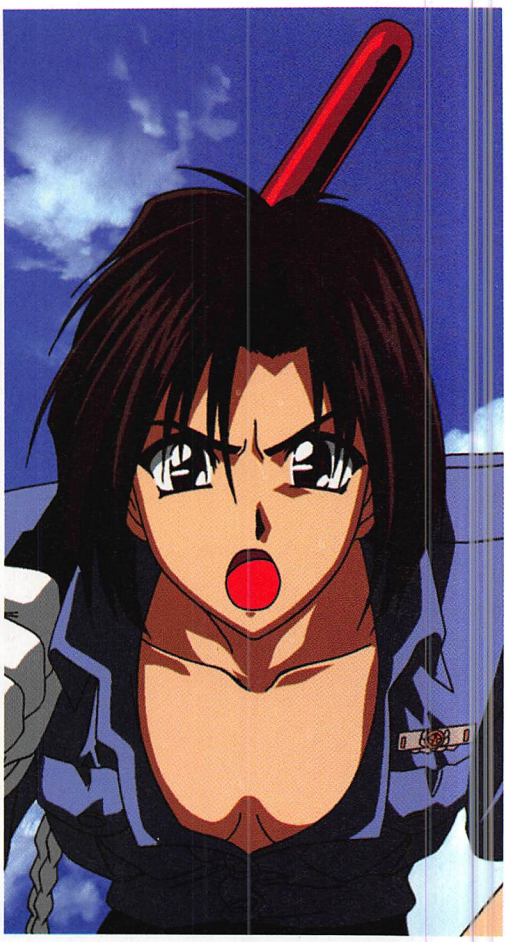
You're Under Arrest: Mini Specials

"...imagine every possible pratfall involving horny perverted cops, dimwitted criminals, and chicks with attitude and you can imagine the guilty pleasure at hand."



Think Japanese Police Academy meets Lethal Weapon with bad girl protagonists (well one is actually a she-male) and you're on the way to enlightenment, *You're Under Arrest*-style. Within five episodes containing four "Mini Specials" each, *YUA* follows the exploits of Bokuto Station Traffic Officers Natsumi and Miyuki and their partners in anti-crime, Yuriko and Aoi (the she-male). Played out like a year's worth of sitcoms in one marathon sitting, now imagine every possible pratfall involving horny perverted cops, dimwitted criminals, and chicks with attitude and you can imagine the guilty pleasure at hand. A satire retread that could just have easily gone completely awry, *YUA* avoids the me-too scrap heap with quality TV-level animation, a cool script, *EX Driver*-like auto sequences, and more than a few genuine laughs. Plus it's all leading up to the *YUA* movie, which looks outstanding (be sure and check the ADV previews for it). Between *Burn-Up, Airbats, Gunsmith Cats* and *You're Under Arrest*, ADV seems to have cornered the market on hot chicks with authority.

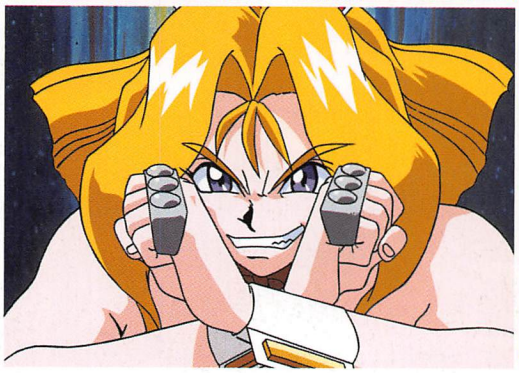
DAVE HALVERSON

- **studio:** adv films
- **rating:** 15 & up
- **running time:** 150 min
- **available:** now

B-

Variable Geo

"How convenient is it that they all have giant breasts and the loser has to strip? Well, very, I suppose."



ADV's 1999 big boob buster OVA, *Variable Geo*, has finally made its way to DVD, and eight years after its Japanese debut, it's still the weirdest fighter ever. What begins looking like a great idea for a Fox reality show ends up, well, somewhere else entirely. Containing violence, nudity, lethal injections and demonic possession, *Variable Geo* is, at its foundation, about a tournament so universally regarded that boxing rings rise up out of the street outside of restaurants for impromptu matches in the ultimate competition to decide the world's toughest waitress. How convenient is it that they all have giant breasts and the loser has to strip? Well, very, I suppose. But get this: the winner receives 10 million bucks and premium real-estate in the city of her choice! Hot dog! Why does this anime exist? Why exactly has it come back to taunt us? Why not just press them boobs up against the screen for 75 minutes? Well, because then Yuka's best friend Satomi couldn't be sucked into plotting against her, then lured into becoming the demon host of the mother of last year's winner, why else?

Like in all prize fighting, the corporate sponsors behind the "VG Warriors" are the real villains, and what better way to serve up yet another corporate cliffhanger than with street fighting waitresses on the side? Don't forget to tip your waitress!

DAVE HALVERSON

- **studio:** adv films
- **rating:** 15 & up
- **running time:** 75 min
- **available:** now

B

Volume One available as a single disc or a
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Mahoromatic: Automatic Maiden - vol. 3: A Warrior's Fate

With only a year left, Mahoro begins to reflect on her past and must also deal with an old rival, expending precious life energy. Born a weapon, living out her days as her human companion Suguru's keeper, this funny, provocative and bittersweet sci-fi tale continues to deliver on all counts, proving itself to be among the best android-based anime ever, rivaling *Steel Angel Kurumi* and *Hand Maid May*.

studio: pioneer animation • **rating:** 13 & up • **running time:** 100 min • **available:** now

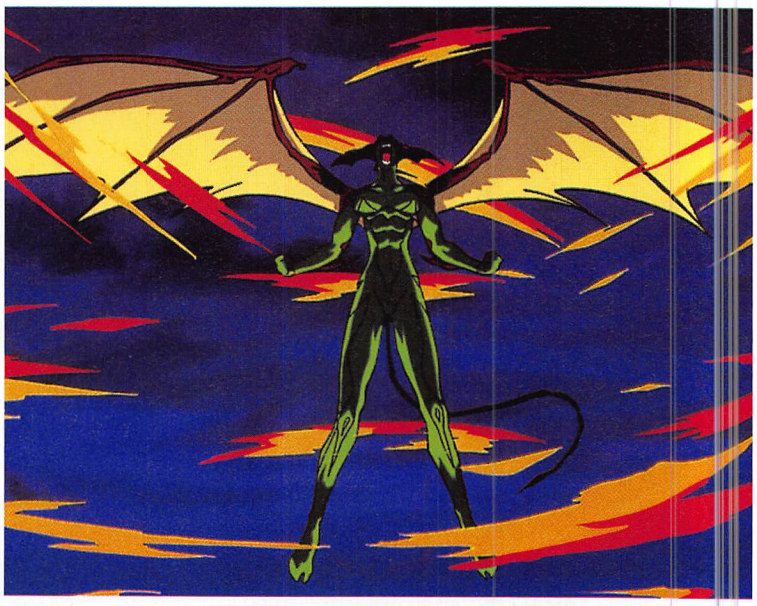
B+

Devil Lady - vol. 4: The Gathering

Go Nagai's cold, dark, brutally serious horror serial continues down the dark path, unobstructed by anything cheeky. Jun now struggles more than ever with her inner demon; she may be all that stands between the evolution of the new breed and humanity. Not for the faint of heart, *Devil Lady*'s reward lies in its story and dialogue. I think the father of a slain human family described the setting best, as a place "so bad even the bikers won't come."

studio: adv films • **rating:** 17 & up • **running time:** 100 min • **available:** now

B

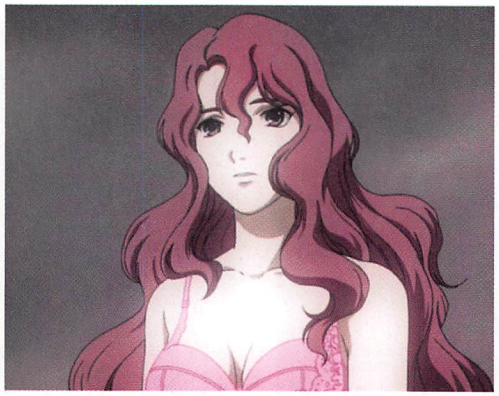


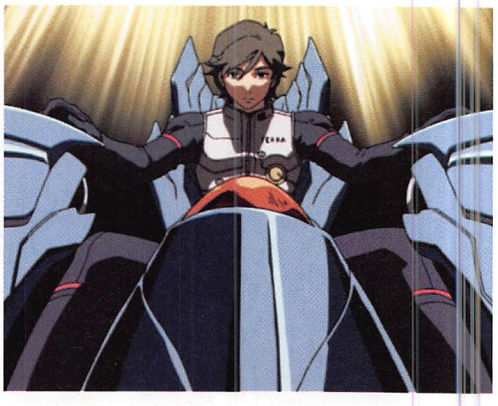
RahXephon - Orchestration 2: Tonal Pattern

Ayato's odyssey continues, as does this amazing series' unique take on mecha and the space floating just beyond Earth's grasp. Although still chipping away at the complexity of the plot after Volume 1's mega-twist, the smoke is beginning to clear on the world as Ayato now knows it and its origins, including one Mu's mass destruction and return in particular. Using a snowstorm as a means in which to further the character development, however, is Volume 2's best bit.

studio: adv films • **running time:** 100 min • **rating:** 15 & up • **available:** now

A-



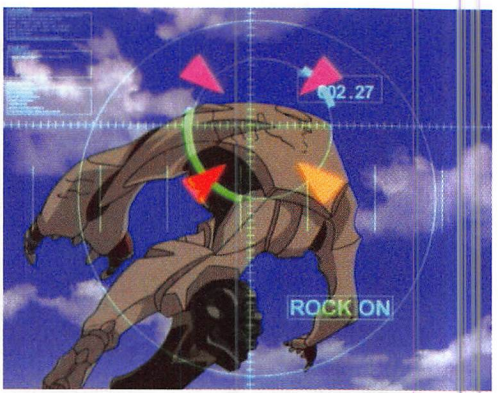


Argentosoma - vol. 3: No Tears

A child in control of the world's most powerful weapon against alien invaders, and a man struggling with the death of his girlfriend by its resurrection...what could possibly go wrong? FUNERAL struggles with Hattie and the EX 1 (which she still calls Elf), and Takuto is beginning to struggle with his place in FUNERAL and what drove him to an extreme he can't seem to carry out. Argentosoma is humming along very nicely.

studio: bandai entertainment • **running time:** 100 min • **rating:** 13 & up • **available:** now

B+



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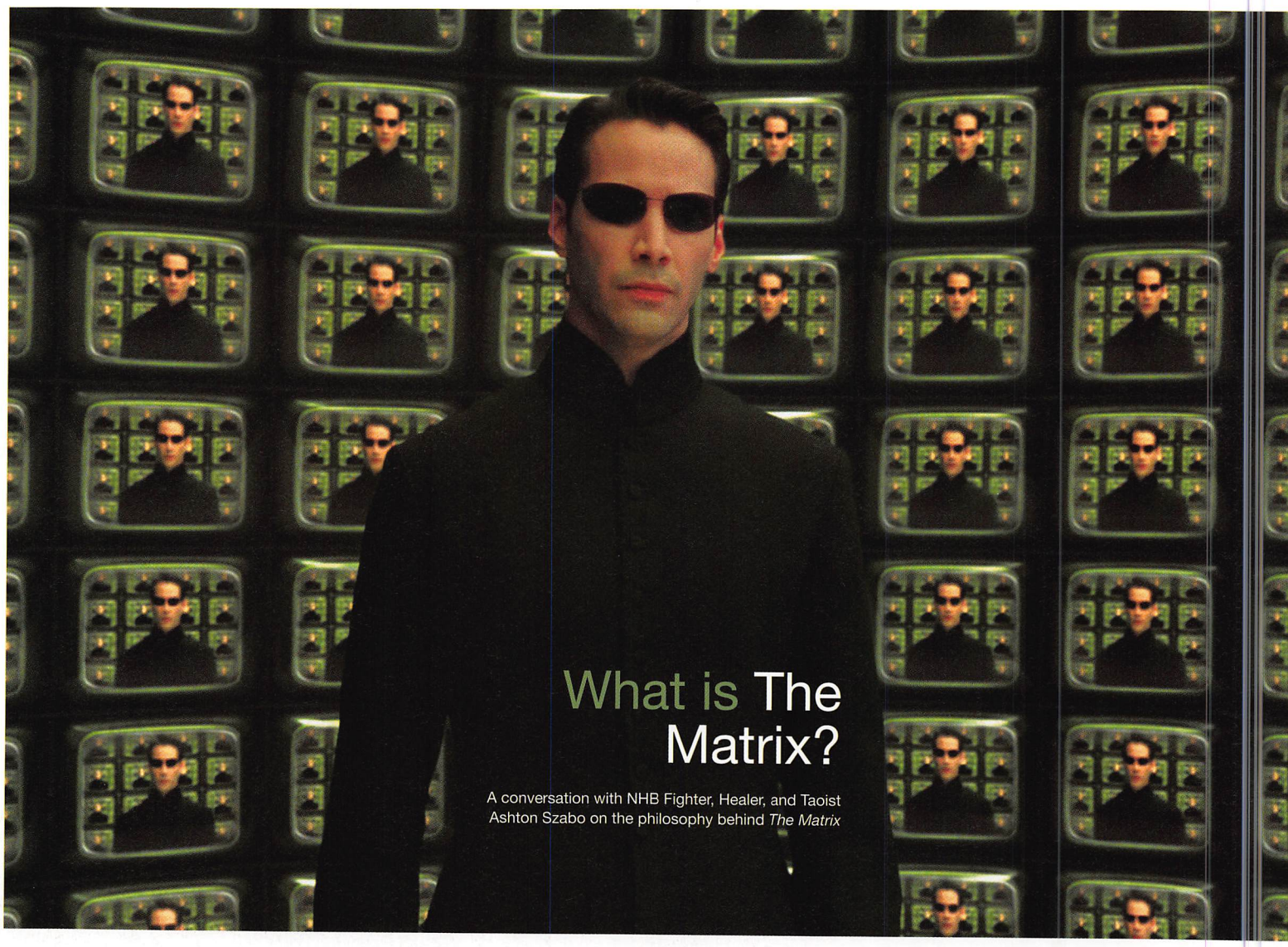


What is The Matrix?

A conversation with NHB Fighter, Healer, and Taoist Ashton Szabo on the philosophy behind *The Matrix*

The *Matrix* movies. Fun to look at, but there is a lot of discussion on the philosophy and religious underpinnings. You can dig more for some interesting interpretations if you want. Like the Agent Smith character. He seems to be more than just a prototypical bad guy, a manifestation of evil.
Ashton Szabo: Yes, but what's his purpose? It's deliberate. What's happening to him, being able to take over other agents and people, has a large purpose for the Wachowski brothers. They're trying to say something with that. It's not just that he is simply typical evil. There is that Yin and Yang, how they are connected. In Eastern thought, there is no pure evil. And we are to accept that suffering will occur, we are to coexist for a reason.

Smith actually says to Neo, "You gave me purpose."
Right. And that purpose has not been fully revealed yet. They're interconnected through the causality of everything. Just as Neo's purpose is supposedly to free mankind, what is Agent Smith's role in it as far as the grand scheme of things? Other than just to be a character to get in the way? When Dante is moving through hell and reaches different levels and obstacles, they are there for a purpose; they're there to say something. If you are ready to do something in your life, you will. But if you're not ready, you'll just talk about it. When you're ready, the understanding is determined by very specific events happening in your life that will make you ready. If those events haven't happened yet, those things that are necessary for self-realization, then it's not going to happen. It's not until those causes happen. Now, if you believe in cause and effect, you can't even control yourself. What we're going to do is because of what happened to us before, not because of a specific choice in the now. What modern philosopher Spinoza says, choice does not exist, so in a way, we are absolved of responsibility. It just is going to happen. Maybe you have to face that reality. But in our society, we break down on such a concept. You've already made the choice, but what you actually do is choose before you were born. Notice what the Oracle said: you've already made the choice, Neo, now it's your job to understand why.

The technology, the slick Matrix construct, seems to raise all sorts of compelling scenarios.
Neo can jack into the machines and free the people. It's interesting that Smith can infect the people lying in the cocoons outside the Matrix by infecting them with a computer program inside the system. It sort of leads to the idea that we're just organic computers. From the very second we're born, our brains are programmed to understand that if this happens, then there is this response; when that happens, I expect this to happen; and on and on. We're a collection of these inputs. As we get older, we have more information to make our interpretations. It's the exact same way computers do it, but they aren't as advanced to do it on a level as our brains. And how fascinating that Neo can receive this imprinting inside the Matrix, and yet can retain and bring that information outside, allowing him to reach his enlightenment and stop the Sentinels with his extraordinary powers. One thing to understand, too, is that the mind in Chinese medicine rests in the heart. So by mind I do not refer to the brain.

That eternal philosophical precept: I think, therefore I am. That seems to be a seed to a lot of this.
How do we know reality exists? This theme is familiar and runs throughout the film, but really think about the root of this. Your senses: touch, taste, hearig, smell. Is that reality? Well, all it is is electrical impulses perceived by the brain—and as for the brain, we don't have a clue what it really is all about. Which means our brain could be sitting inside a jar right now told to think something specific. And if so, who is the programmer? But when you continue to

"But our brains don't have the experience to consciously move through the table. The second you can let go, and if everything is indeed of energy and of the same source, then poof—it goes right through."

dwell on this concept, it goes beyond just the idea that we are impulses and electrical senses from the brain. The brain is not some superior thing in that it is like everything else: matter and energy. It's a computer. Look at that chess program that learns. When this happens and that happens, it expects this to happen. That's what our brain does all our life. That's how we construct our reality from the moment we are born. I see this wood, and my hand can't go through it. Since a child, every time I touched the table, it wouldn't go through it. Philosophers are always talking about how we are stuck in this mindset we are controlled by, and we can't see outside of it. Even Stephen Hawking says it: we live in a world of infinite possibilities. But the second you can let go, that's when you can breach the table. But our brains don't have the experience to consciously move through the table. The second you can let go, and if everything is indeed of energy and of the same source, then poof—it goes right through.
And again, like in the first movie: the kid says, don't bend the spoon, that's impossible. Only realize that it's your mind that bends.

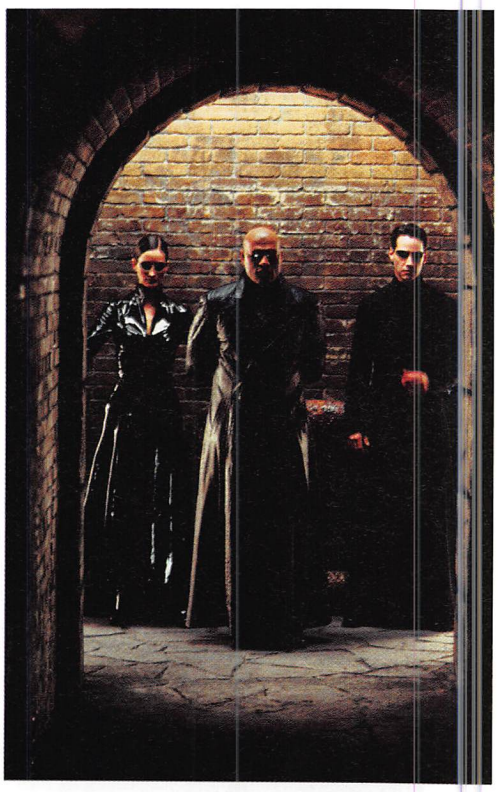
The movie talks a lot about opening the door. And there's that scene where the keymaker holds the key.
A common theme in Eastern thought is that I can show you the door, but your interpretation, what you discover, is your own. I can even open the door for you, but I can't walk through it for you. Also, Agent Smith is right before the door, saying, sorry, it's a dead end. He was another representation of that self-doubt. One of Neo's keys to the other side is shedding self-doubt. The runner in the *Animatrix* wouldn't have that problem, but he had his own stumbling blocks. If you believe the process behind his choice, it's not truly a choice. We are constantly going up, even when you're going down. He shed his self-doubt. He keeps on climbing levels, but falling during the process.

It's almost like Neo transcends choice the moment he saves Trinity.
That's the question: is that what they are really trying to say? Without the third movie, it's difficult to say where they are going with that. This is a little bit of a tired theme, because a lot of people do say this—when they talk about destiny, they say we have a choice, we can change things, on and on. But if what the Wachowskis are saying throughout the movie is consistent and true, then I'm sorry, no, you don't have choice. If you are following Spinoza, then it's, "No, what you are going to do is based on all those experiences that have programmed you." You're automatically going to do them because of those experiences in your life. So are they saying that he actually made that choice, and that is what is going to change this huge spark in the movie with everything? Or was that simply the next step he needed to go to? It's all part of the grand theme of him gaining enlightenment. If you believe the process he goes through to reach enlightenment, you can't believe that he has choice. That's a problem. But there are even contradictions on this in Eastern thought. Although in Eastern thought, contradictions don't cause the same problems they do in Western thought. Contradictions are OK because life is full of contradictions.

The movie talks a lot about control. We certainly are a society mired in self-inflicted torture.
A big part of Taoism, of Eastern thought, is that there is no control. We have no control, and we must learn not to be controlled. Neo was controlled by self-doubt. The keymaker held the key to the door to The Source. He had to let go to free himself to move closer toward his enlightenment. Like the teachings of Buddhism, life is all about suffering, but to let go is to learn there is no control. The Merovingian talks a bit about that you just need to read what's going on in the game. What you're going to do at the time you're going to do it, you're going to do because every past experience you've had in your life leads up to that moment. Your experiences throughout your life from the day you were born lead you up to every experience you have. Because if you had it slightly different, you might have made a different choice. But because you had it the way you did, that's going to be the end result. The Oracle said don't fight it, just understand it.

The idea of love gets abused in filmmaking, but it

"There is this interesting emphasis on threes. There is Trinity, Morpheus and Neo; even the name Trinity denotes the number three."



certainly is a powerful emotion. You probably look uniquely at the love between Neo and Trinity.
In Taoism, love is a very important emotion. It's the fire energy. Joy is a part of this, but essentially it's love. The process of Taoism, Buddhism, stuff like that is to find balance within your body. To find balance between all these different types of emotions. Sexuality, lust for power, it's all connected. In *The Matrix*, it was a process of, again, just thinking from the mind perspective. Neo believed all was possible, because he was able to save Trinity and bring her back to life. The idea that love is such an important aspect—that's why they focus on the relationship so much in the movie. In the first movie, she brings him back through love. In Reloaded, he brings her back. Neo's not making this journey by himself. When they get home to Zion, and all those people are there with gifts for Neo, treating him like a Christ figure, he's told, "It's OK, they need you." But he responds, "I need you." Everybody needs that complementary thing. We're all social creatures. We're not going to exist purely by ourselves. As much as we would love to separate ourselves as individuals, we're much too connected to be separate as individuals.

Neo transfers his enlightenment from the Matrix to his real world. You almost miss it the first time, when Neo stops the Sentinels with his powers outside the Matrix.
I think it is going toward the Descarte idea of the mind. What is reality? Again, it's his mind releasing him in the Matrix, and this discovery connects to his being outside this programmed fantasy world. You're free of the supposed laws of nature. It's not a matter of how you get there, but that you get there. We are all on the same path, but we are all at different points.
For Neo to get to a certain point, a certain amount of things have to happen in a specific way. Certain people have to come into his life at specific times. Again, everything happens for a reason. You and I met for a certain reason. If it's as insignificant as knowing each other, then that's it. Or say we get together and write an article. If it's for the specific purpose of that, then that's it. Everything has a purpose and a reason, and it's because of the previous causes and effects. And what we do continues that chain. It's all predictable, but it rests on such an enormous, grand scale that we can't comprehend it. But from the start of existence to this second—like Spinoza argues—there was a beginning cause and all these subsequent effects, a source.

I guess you could think about even the Wachowskis making *The Matrix*. It's had an effect on us. Whatever your opinion on the film, however basic its philosophy, it still reaches somewhere they probably didn't imagine.
But what they imagined it to be is completely irrelevant. No one in this world is insignificant, it's just that we all play a different yet very specific part. Let's say our part to play is that we compose this article, and some guy reads it and doesn't go on to do anything the world would consider special in life. But let's say he is interested in taking the stuff we're talking about and probing deeper. He goes to the store to buy a book and meets his future wife, or he said something nice to a depressed seller behind the counter, who ends up having a better day and is a bit less preoccupied on the drive home and avoids an accident because of it. In the end, you can't explain it all or understand it all—especially when we're not at the level where we can even go through the table—but it all goes back to that source. It's something that goes so far beyond our method of knowledge.

There is benefit to looking further, even if what you first see looks empty.
When literary scholars look at the "Iliad," for example, they pull from it very specific ideals and morals of the Greek society at the time. Through the use of characters and story they are getting much richer stuff from it. Most talk of The Matrix goes towards the conspiracy theory side of it or they're just enjoying the action. But if you look at the process of it all...
Like Greek mythology, for example, where they're talking about these things they are experiencing with these gods and these fascinating situations, but all they are really doing is explaining a path to what they believe will make them a better human being. Even the Greeks had concepts of enlightenment. Of perfection. The Source talks about perfection.

He says we are bound by perfection.
Well, if we are bound by perfection, it is that the original source was perfect. Even the cause and effect could be viewed as perfection. We are not perfect, but our existence is perfect. And if you look in the Bible, it says it is our goal to strive for perfection. The Christian belief is that God is the source of it all, and only he is pure perfection. Some would argue that we're all striving for the same thing, only defining it differently in our human ways. Everything happens for a reason. The reason, the why, is perfect.

So do only the great ones become enlightened?
Not great. Jesus Christ said this is something we can all do. Believe in me—the source—and your faith will move mountains. They are extraordinary in our society because of the things that we have seemingly forgotten or moved away from. Neo was just a computer nerd, but he became something extraordinary. Christ was just a carpenter. The movie deals a lot in philosophy, but the biblical parallels are also very interesting.

What was the deal with the orgasm scene with the woman in the restaurant?
It's the second chakra. It's the sexual energy, the seat of our desire. And our society today is very second-chakra oriented. The desire for power, for money, is symbolized by this same shakra. Remember in the movie where the Oracle talks about men who obtain power simply want more. And we're also bound to the cause and effect. If that person has that drug or whatever it is, then those chemical reactions are going to occur in their body. Cause and effect. We're bound to it. We're slaves to it. Slaves to purpose. We're shakra-oriented, the desire for power, money, sexuality. We're slaves to purpose. We're bound by the cause and effect. This reaction will occur from a number of chains of events. And we're "slaves to this," to this causality.

I like the idea that we can't remove the machines from our lives.
The body cannot live without the mind, and the mind without the body. There is this symbiotic relationship between machines and us in the Matrix. The good needs the bad. The bad needs the good. You don't remove it totally; you live and grow from it.

I watch these movies noticing more of the biblical parallels, especially the names being dropped. The Nebakanezer, Zion, the trinity.
There is this interesting emphasis on threes. There is Trinity, Morpheus and Neo; even the name Trinity denotes the number three. Three ships go into the climactic battle, with three tasks to accomplish. The Christian faith speaks of God, Christ and the Holy Spirit. In Taoism, there is the trinity of mind, body and spirit—of jing, shean and qi. They all coexist and they are all one. Only the third movie can truly reveal if the Wachowskis are going anywhere with this, but the setup is very intriguing. And another interesting concept is the idea that Neo must gather 16 women and 7 men to rebuild Zion. This would make Neo the eighth, with two women for every man.

***Reloaded* isn't receiving the best response. And you get those who say it's Philosophy 101. You can't really argue that, but for an action movie, I can't remember the last time I at least had something to think about and explore.**
Here's the thing: the whole precept of philosophy is that you either get it or you don't. And your explanation comes only after the basics have been presented. If it's surface philosophy, the value comes as much in the afterthought. Cause and effect.

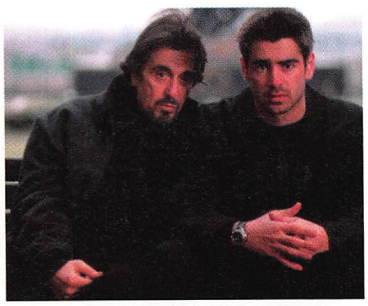
Die Another Day
MGM Home Entertainment

Bond is back and his latest isn't as bad as you think. Mr. Brosnan reprises his role as the famed MI6 operative this time, saving the world from a madman with a big solar raygun. Does the story matter? Hardly. Following the same formula used in pretty much all of the Bond movies, the story plays second fiddle to the babes, exotic locales and, of course, the wickedly cool gadgets. Pierce puts on a great performance (per usual), showing his age and wearing it well. Supporting cast is top notch with breakout performances by Rick Yune (Zao) and the luscious Rosamund Pike (Miranda Frost). And when you wrap it all up with Halle Berry, this Bond doesn't miss a beat.

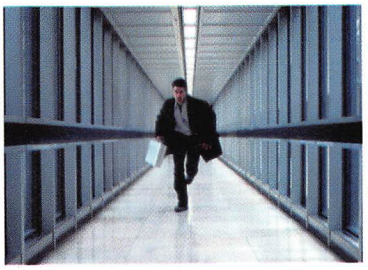
This double disc set is, without a doubt, one of the best DVDs ever produced. Aside from an excellent video transfer (2.35:1 anamorphic widescreen)—colors are lush and vibrant and the contrasts are also brilliant—the audio is simply superb. Showcasing both Dolby Digital EX and DTS 5.1. ES Matrixed mixes, this is the best-sounding Bond ever. But the true icing on the cake are the bonus features, namely the MI6 Datastream and the Inside Die Another Day documentary. The MI6 Datastream is a flawless piece of DVD technology. Utilizing pop-up overlays that seamlessly appear throughout the film, viewers are given the 411 about a particular scene. Small featurettes (called Incoming Transmissions) are also incorporated into the Datastream and the end result is simply brilliant. On the second disc is the Inside Die Another Day documentary. Comprised of eight vignettes covering key parts of the film, the documentary gives great insight and information on the makings of this latest Bond movie. Well done, 007, well done indeed. *–Tom Ham*

movie: B
dvd: A

The Recruit
Touchstone Pictures



In the credibility-deprived CIA thriller The Recruit, Al Pacino stretches his acting chops beyond the screenplay's call of duty, but you still can't enjoy his typical incendiary presence when everything is collapsing around him. Pacino plays Walter Burke, a government recruit who hangs out in bars and stalks would-be agents. he takes an exceptional interest in James Clayton (a typically engaging Colin Farell), a confident



young MIT whiz-kid who eventually gives in to his prodding and heads out to join the clandestine CIA training grounds, know as The Farm. Here we get to see one incredulous scene after another as the recruits learn the skills of the job, like getting tortured in class and having to pick up a partner at a local bar for sex. by the time the story flies completely off the rails, what little action holding the inane dialogue together has already worn out its welcome. Extras don't help much: deleted scenes, a by-the-numbers director/actor commentary, and a somewhat entertaining look at the real CIA. Farell can be heard saying he didn't like the script but wanted to work with Pacino. Indeed. *–Brady Fiechter*

movie: C
dvd: C

The Fast and the Furious: All New Tricked Out Edition
Universal

The Fast and the Furious takes us into the relatively unknown yet exciting world of street racing, submerging us in a high-speed adrenaline tank of cool cars and sexy women as well as any summer slice of cheese can. There are gangs, fights, exciting chase scenes and Vin Diesel becoming a star. We can look past the dialogue—"I live my life a quarter mile at a time"—and just strap in for the fun ride. This DVD seems like a stretch to capitalize on the upcoming sequel; you get a free movie ticket inside. but cool added features like "Tricking Out a Hot Import Car" will please the more knowledgeable fans of the movie. Also included is a look at the film's stunts and a load of featurettes on 2 Fast 2 Furious. *–Brady Fiechter*

movie: B-
dvd: B

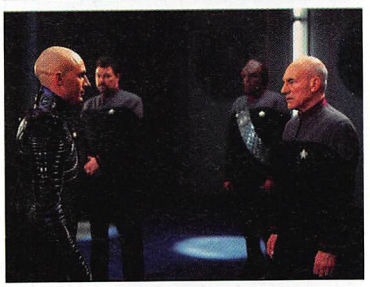
Star Trek Nemesis
Paramount

As a Star Trek fan, I had some hopes for Nemesis. Especialy as Insurrection was so bloody awful. Generally, the series will rebound after an awful tragedy (witness Star Trek V and Star Trek: Generations). But is not to be this time around. No doubt it's better than Insurrection, which featured the lamest Star Trek movie premise since V, but Nemesis wants to recreate the energy and emotion of Star Trek II and it can't even come close. First of all, the idea of a Picard clone is ridiculous, as is the dune buggy chase that opens the film. Could anyone explain to me why there is a dune buggy on board the Enterprise? Probably because the stars' bloated salaries wouldn't allow for another effects sequence to be added. With that said, Stuart Baird, a verteran action editor, does a good job directing what he has been given and the film has a pretty good overall look. Digital Domain's effects work is also top notch.

But the film just can't sit still. Scenes of characters simply talking to one another, as they do in all the good Star Trek films (1, 2, 4, 6), are simply absent.

As for the extra materials, they're not too bad. There's a commentary by director Baird, along with some decent behind-the-scenes stuff and a look at deleted scenes which probably would have helped the movie a bit had they stayed in. Oh, and five bucks for anybody that spots Bryan Singer (X-Men director) lurking about on the bridge briefly. *–Michael Hobbs*

movie: C
dvd: B



Rob Dougan: Reloading the Matrix's Music

words lucas mast

Bad music can ruin a movie or a video game. Good music, on the other hand, can make passing the hours very pleasant—even serving to enhance the overall experience. Judging from his track record, Rob Dougan easily falls into the second category. First making his appearance with the track "Clubbed to Death" as background music for the infamous "woman in the red dress" scene in the first Matrix, Rob returns to contribute two tracks to the soundtrack and score of the blockbuster Matrix Reloaded. Play talked with Rob about the future of music and the role he will likely play in its continuing evolution.

For those in the electronic music world, Rob Dougan is one of the classic producers, dating back to the original release of the timeless "Clubbed to Death" on Mo Wax Records almost 10 years ago. Still considered one of the most forward-looking tracks even today, it seems only fitting that Rob Dougan should play such a pivotal role in the musical landscape of the Matrix Reloaded. "Both Jason Bentley, who was the music supervisor and the Wachowski brothers (directors) liked my track in the first movie, so they wanted me to play a larger musical role in the sequel. For 'Chateau,' the track I did for the score, I went to the 20th Century Fox soundstage—where John Williams recorded the music for Star Wars. Truly a once in a lifetime experience for someone like myself," mused Dougan.

But for those familiar with Dougan's work, they know that he is not giving himself the proper credit. On his forthcoming album, Furious Angels, Dougan employed a full 100+ piece orchestra to accompany him—almost unheard of measures in these times of tight budgets and pressures from labels. "I paid for it myself," asserts Dougan. "Music is very personal with me and there is no going half way. It is more than simply notes on a CD—it is an expression and everything the artist brings to it will add to the experience." But commercial success is not a benchmark for Dougan's success, at least personally: "The Velvet Underground sold 12 copies of the first album, Jesus had 12 mates...good things can come in small numbers," asserts Dougan.

Whether it is a track off his album, or his short-film quality videos, fans of Dougan's work will always get more than their money's worth. "In the future, all albums will likely come out on DVD and will be more than simply a musical experience. And with Internet access becoming so pervasive and so fast, technology will enable people to have a very interactive experience." In Rob Dougan's future, many of the one-dimensional fluff acts that pervade the music scene today will likely become a relic of the past. Dougan's music has garnered critical acclaim in the space that has made stars of acts like Dirty Vegas and Telepopmusik—namely commercials. With his sounds backing up commercials for Audi, Lincoln and the Royal Mail, Dougan's tracks may seem familiar to you even if you think you have never heard of him.

"Music is very personal with me and there is no going half way. It is more than simply notes on a CD..."

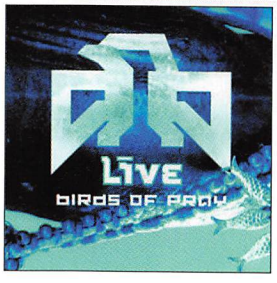
Talking briefly about video games, since Enter the Matrix has sold over a million copies so far, Dougan professed a love for any games that featured fast cars and faster action sequences. "I would love to get more involved with video game scoring, assuming that it was a project that I could stand behind and have some creative freedom. That is the problem with movie scores—you need to have the right relationship with the directors—and also taking a year out of your life is a big commitment." One year must seem like a short holiday to Dougan, who spent over six years making Furious Angels. And how will the album translate into live performance, which Dougan will undertake in some select U.S. cities in support of the album? "My music has a pretty dramatic side to it, but I plan on making up for some of what is lost by having some impressive visuals to accompany myself and the other musicians," contends Dougan.

The accomplished Dougan has come a long way from his early Mo Wax days. "I think the album sold literally six copies upon its release. But now people always want that track ("Clubbed to Death") and it gives me a sense that people might get my music." Odds are that future generations will still be talking about the music of Rob Dougan. A fitting place in musical history for someone who is light years ahead of his contemporary peers.

For the latest news and to hear tracks from Furious Angels, go to www.robdougan.com

quick takes

live • birds of pray — radioactive



"I believe in the sanctity of dreams," belts Live's vein-popping vocalist Ed Kowalczyk, and you have to wonder if he's smiling when he lets these and other syrupy banalities rip on the band's most stale album yet. Something happened to these anthemic boys from Pennsylvania after Throwing Copper produced one big hit after another. The dynamic is familiar: start quiet, build up, crunch, fade, throw in a ballad or two for obligatory measure. The music isn't amateur hour, and if you've been following Live from the start, you can't help but hold out for the stronger tracks. *–Brady Fiechter* **C+**

yeah yeah yeahs • fever to tell — interscope

It's somewhat minimalistic and doesn't even feel the need for bass guitar, but Fever to Tell is post-punk-infused electricity that jolts as much as it pleases your classic rock ear. There's something powerful and earnest in singer Karen O's voice, and the sonic flame around her continues to burn from the moment you hear the layered spark from Nick Zinner's guitar. Rock seems to be continuing to climb back to its stripped-down roots, and bands like the Yeah Yeah Yeahs show how invigorating this return to soul can truly be. *–Brady Fiechter* **B+**

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Sony released its first AIBO back in June of 1999; the first two letters, AI, stand for Artificial Intelligence, and the second two, BO, stand for robot. After spending some quality time with the ERS-210, Entertainment AIBO, it is definitely one of the most compelling and thought-provoking products we've ever seen. Comprised of 20 motors that give it an incredible amount of motion, the ERS-210 is our new best friend. With built-in sensors, the AIBO will react to your touch with a wide variety of emotions. Whether it's happy, sad, angry or surprised, users will know exactly how their AIBO is feeling by its eyes, ears, tail and lights. Unlike previous versions of the AIBO, the new ERS-210 can utilize different types of AIBOware (software programs sold separately). AIBO Recognition allows AIBO to recognize his owner's face and react accordingly and communicate verbally. It will even recharge itself when his power gets low. Our personal favorite was AIBO Explorer. With Explorer installed, your AIBO will understand 75 words, climb stairs, and even take your picture with its built-in camera.

Matrix phone

Samsung SPH-n270

www.samsungtelecom.com/matrix/
$500

You've seen the movie, now you can own the phone. Sprint's latest PCS device is the uber-cool Samsung SPH-n270. Identical to the phone seen in Matrix Reloaded, the SPH-n270 sports the signature pop-up release mechanism (complete with authentic ringers taken directly from the movie). Without a doubt, this is the ultimate Matrix fan-boy product. At first glance, one might misconstrue the SPH-n270 as a toy—like a movie tie-in similar to a happy meal at McDs. That's hardly the case. For starters, the SPH-n270 has a high-resolution 65k color TFT LCD screen. It has the highest resolution of any color LCD out there. The built-in Yamaha 40 poly melody chip allows for crystal-clear audio with the capability of creating your own signature sounds. And every time you access a Menu option, it will show you a scene from the movie (10 scenes in all). You can even change the icons to reflect the Animatrix if you so desire. A tri-mode phone, the SPH-n270 runs on Sprint's CDMA 800/1900 and AMPS 800 PCS networks. The voice quality was surprisingly clear and the new "intenna" (the traditional antenna is now inside the phone) delivered outstanding reception. On the flip-side, the SPH-n270 does have some shortcomings, namely no Web browsing and game support. This voice-only phone does, however, supports two-way SMS messaging. So when Neo tries to contact you, you're only a couple of keystrokes away.

Portable CR-RW, DVD-ROM reader

Sony MPD-AP20U

www.sony.com
$299

Sony's latest all-in-one gadget, the MPD-AP20U, has taken all of the cool features found in similar desktop units and streamlined it into one tight little package. Not only is it a portable CD-RW drive, but it doubles as a CD player (able to play MP3 and WAV files burned on a CD) and DVD-ROM reader—think portable CD player on steroids. Under the hood, the MPD-AP20U boasts 24X maximum CD-R recording, 10X maximum CD-RW recording and 24X maximum CD-ROM reading and when you utilize the built-in USB 2.0 support, the MPD-AP20U can deliver blazing-fast data transfers on the go. There is also a handy-dandy Memory Stick slot so users can instantly burn digital images or media files right onto a CD. The software suite is equally impressive. The MPD-AP20U comes bundled with B's Recorder Gold (for Windows and Mac), B's Clip (Windows), Retrospect Express (Windows and Mac), ArcSoft PhotoBase (Windows and Mac), ArcSoft PhotoStudio (Windows and Mac), MusicMatch Jukebox (Windows) and Cyberlink Power DVD (Windows). And with a price just under $300, you would be hard pressed to find a similar product for less.

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devil may cry

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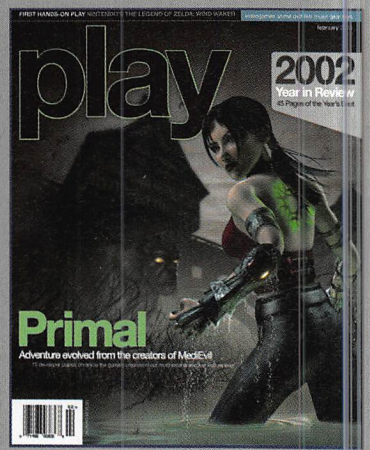

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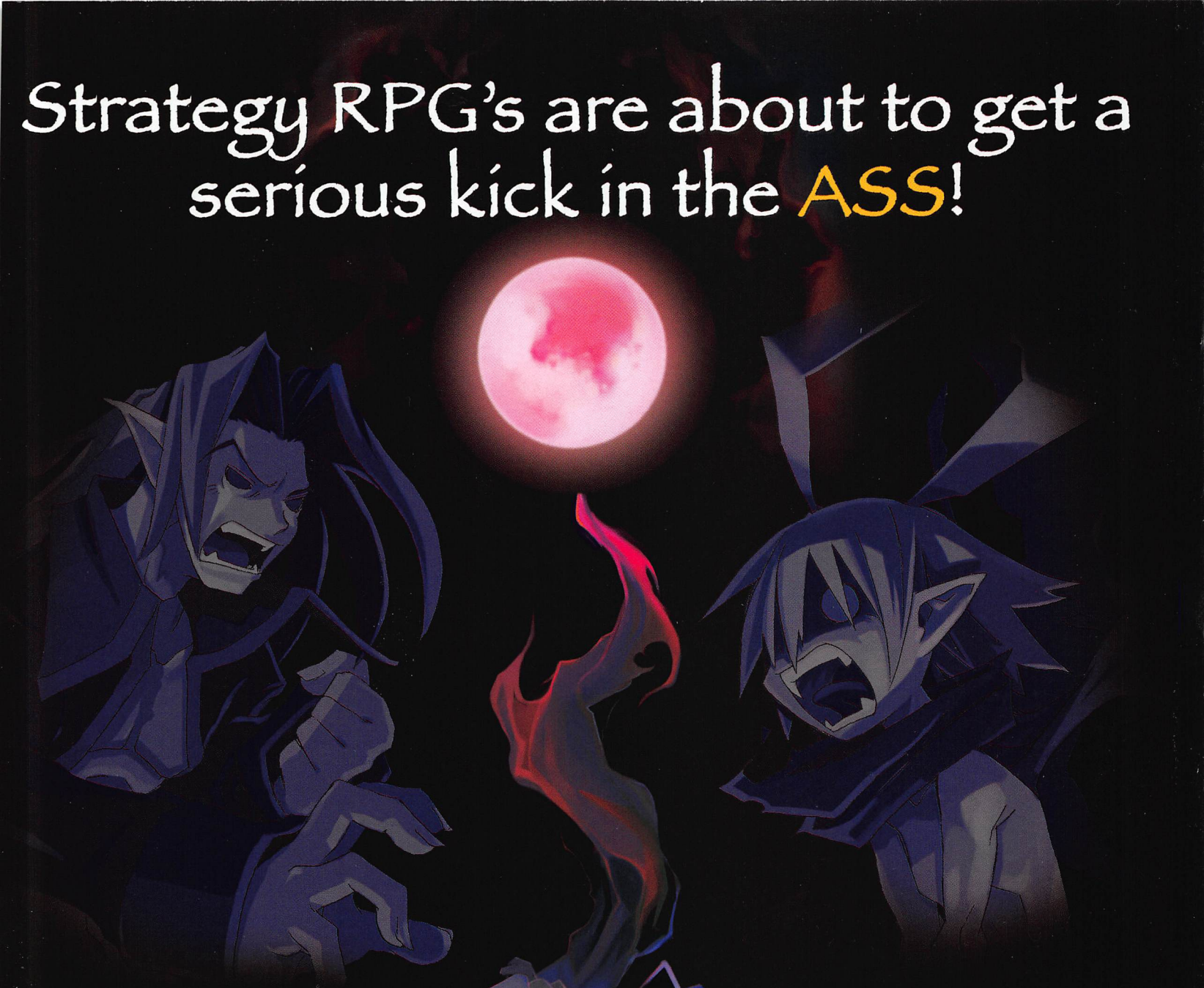

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